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The Practice of the Churches in
NEW-ENGLAND, relating to

BAPTISM,

VINDICATED.

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The general PRACTICE of the Churches
of NEW-ENGLAND, relating to

BAPTISM,

UNINDICATED:

OR, SOME

ESSAYS

ON THIS IMPORTANT QUESTION,

Whether the Practice of Persons owning or renewing the
Covenant, and having Baptism for their Children without
coming immediately into full Communion, be warrant-
able?

Delivered at several Church-Meetings in PLYMOUTH,

WITH SOME

LETTERS

THAT PASSED ON THE SUBJECT,

By JOHN COTTON, A. M.

of PLYMOUTH.

Acts x. 47. Can any Man forbid Water, that these should
not be baptized?

Prov. xxi. 2. Open thy Mouth in the Cause of the
Dumb.

Finis Baptismi præter cæteros ei cum Sacra Cæna communio
est Receptionis seu Infusionis in Familiam Dei Obsequatio.

Natura ordine prius est nasci quam pasci: Ita prior
Baptismus Cæna Domini.

WOLLEN.

B O S T O N :

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE ground of the following Essays was this. December 19, 1770, the Pastor called the church together "to consider some matters of importance relative to church-discipline," &c. Among other things, this question was proposed for the church's consideration.

"Whether it be the opinion of this church, that the *halfway practice* of owning or entering into covenant (without coming into full communion) which has of late years been adopted by this church, be a scriptural method, or a practice warranted by the word of God, and so to be persisted in?"

Copy per CHANDLER ROBBINS.

The Pastor was strenuous for the negative.

5-47-20

1496.



P R E F A C E.

PROVIDENCE seems to render the present publication necessary. The interest of CHRIST's kingdom, my own reputation, and the importunity of friends concurring, I could not withstand the motion, although I am exceeding loth to engage in a religious controversy in my advanced state of life. The first of these Essays was thrown together in haste without strict order or method, being partly collected, and partly what occurred to my mind in reading the scriptures; and in solemn reflection. The other Essays (especially the second and the last) were written with more deliberation, and are in the same method, and are nearly in the same words as they were delivered. The last piece which should have been more properly the first, in order to exact stating of the controversy, lays the foundation upon which the whole is built. But the reason of this was, that children's membership was acknowledged in the first church-meetings, and accordingly my arguments were founded on this concession. But in the church-meetings last *March*, their membership, or at least the continuance of it at adult age, was openly denied; and all the relation they

P R E F A C E.

they had to the church was said to be this, that they were *laid under bonds* to enter into covenant personally at adult age and to come to full communion; which if they failed to do, their relation to the church wholly ceased. This occasioned my last Essay. I have had thoughts of reducing the whole that I have said in the controversy into one piece, which would have considerably shortened the work: But this would have taken up as much time as the first composition, which I had not leisure for; and therefore the whole comes forth in the present form. Some of the same arguments recur in the following that were brought in the first piece, but they are set forth in a manner so differing as serves to throw light on the subject. I shall conclude this Preface with one caution. That whereas some expressions taken singly may seem to carry the matter too far in favour of *unregenerate*, (*openly such*) I desire the reader always to take such passages in connection with what is said elsewhere, and then the seeming repugnancy will wholly vanish. I leave the whole to the Reader's candor; and hope the divine blessing will attend it, as it was really meant to serve the cause of CHRIST in a point which I apprehend of great importance.

T H E
F I R S T E S S A Y,

QUEST. **W**HETHER the practice of persons owning or renewing the covenant, and having baptism for their children, without coming immediately to full communion, be warrantable?

Arguments for the affirmative.

I. I THINK the famous Mr. *Mitchell's* argument unanswerable. "1st, The whole visible church under the new testament is to be baptized. 2d. If a man be once in the church (whether admitted at age or in infancy) nothing less than censurable evil can put him out. 3d. If the parent be in the visible church, his infant child is also."

This was the chief argument that convinced Dr. *Bartholomew*. It is impossible to get over this argument, but by saying, that not coming immediately to the Lord's table is a censurable evil, a sin that deserves excommunication. But did any church ever hold this? Who has heard or read of any person's being laid under the church-censure merely on this account? I grant, that the contempt of this ordinance deserves excommunication, but not the meer abstaining from it for a while. That may proceed from too high thoughts of the ordinance, and low thoughts of themselves. To cut off such would be a breaking the *bridged* reed with a witness, as Mr. *Leonard* justly observes in the church records. We would bear with a communicant for not coming to the Lord's table if he declares it is from scruples of conscience respecting his state, and not from contempt of the ordinance. Much more should we bear with a member,

ber, that never communicated. Such should be dealt with in *the ministry of the word and from the pulpit*, and not by church censure. They should not be treated as *delinquent members* (as in the case of *heresy or scandal*) but be used with all tenderness.

II. All the arguments brought for infant baptism in general do prove that baptism ought to be administered in the latitude pleaded for. These arguments all center in this, *that if the parents be in the covenant, the children are so likewise, and so ought to have the seal of the covenant.* Now it is granted on all hands, that the parents in question are in the covenant, consequently then children are so too; why then should they not be baptized? To deny the validity of this way of arguing is to give up the cause entirely to the *Anabaptists*; and there is no way left to confute them, and their demand is just when they call for a direct scripture for infant baptism; as some demand a direct scripture in this case, which is exactly to tread in their steps. In short, there is as much proof for this point, as for infant baptism; we argue by *scriptura consequens* both in the one case and the same consequences prove both points.

III. CHRIST says, *Luke xviii. 16. Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God, i. e. Such are of my church.* (This is the ground of the rebuke.) The same may be said of the children in question. They are the children of members, therefore members. And here we may observe, That CHRIST was never so angry with his good disciples upon any occasion, as for this debarring of the subjects of his kingdom being brought to him. Let us fear lest he be as angry with us, if we do the same. The disciples thought that they were not good men that brought these children; they exhibited no positive evidence of grace to their view; neither does CHRIST so much as intimate that they were gracious. But the ground he seems to go upon was, that as they were members of the church, they had a right to bring their children; thereby letting us know, that it is *visible membership* gives the right. If you say, their bringing their children was evidence enough of their faith in CHRIST, the same I say of the persons in question. If you say further, CHRIST would never have commended them for bringing their children, if they had not been real disciples. I answer, this

this is plainly begging the question, and it renders CHRIST's answer to the disciples improper, which should have been (according to their notion) an express declaration of the *parent's fitness*, and not of the *children's interest in the covenant* or visible membership.

IV. "When a man according to scripture rule is become a member of the visible church, and there is no rule in the word to cast him out of the church, such a person has a right to have his children baptized."

V. If these persons are subject to the *rod* or to church-government, they are intitled to the *privileges* of CHRIST's kingdom. We ought not to separate what God has joined together. And we have no business to *judge them that are without*, as we really do if they are entitled to no privileges at all.

VI. Those that submit to CHRIST's *discipline* cannot with any colour of reason be excluded from *discipleship*. And if disciples, they have a right to baptism for their children. And here I would mention that famous text so much alledged by *Anabaptists* and their opponents, *Mat. xxviii. 20. Go disciple * all nations, baptizing them, &c.* Here infants (as part of *nations*) are to be *discipled* and *baptized*. And if *discipled*, all the privileges of disciples belong to them; and when demanded (after they are grown up) cannot justly be withheld from them, without they put a bar in their own way by their wickedness, †

VII. If you exclude baptized persons (of regular lives) from bringing their children to baptism, you treat them as *Pagans* and *Infidels*; you practically say, they have no part in the *LOVE*; you in effect excommunicate them and shut them all out of heaven; for there is no salvation out of the church: You make them visible members of Satan's kingdom; for there is no medium here; a man must be of the one or the other.

VIII. CHRIST says, *feed my lambs*; but this, instead of feeding them, is a thrusting them out of the fold: Instead of *carrying them in our arms* we cut off their heads. And how dreadful is the thought!

IX.

* So the word runs in the original Greek.

† Their *discipleship* is also proved from several other texts by all the writers for infant baptism. To be *discipled* is to be admitted into CHRIST's school and family in order to be taught when capable, &c.

IX. If this rigid principle should prevail, in a few years (according to human prospect) nine tenths of the inhabitants will be in the condition of *Pagans* and *Infidels*; and even the name of Christianity will be in danger of being lost among this people. *

But this would be better (some say) than to come with a lie in their mouths. I answer, they do not come with a lie in their mouths, if they act conscientiously in what they do, if they come out of a sense of the command, and if (as far as they know their own hearts) they are sincere in what they profess, though they cannot say it is a *gracious sincerity*. It is the *wilful hypocrite* that lies to God and per-jures himself, who (conscious of his insincerity) does all to be seen of men, &c. I am persuaded and it may be easily proved from the word of God, that the former sort do not offend God so much by coming in this manner though they have no real grace, as they would do by wholly neglecting the duty. The total neglect is worse than the undue performance. And the same may be said of every duty.

This makes way for the considering some other objections.

I. It is objected, but these persons do not come immediately to the Lord's supper; and therefore they ought to be shut out from other privileges until they will partake of the whole. I answer,

1st. The church in all ages has been larger in admitting to baptism, than the Lord's supper. In the primitive church there were three sorts. 1st. *Catechumens* or well-disposed *Heathens* under instruction. 2^d. *Initiati* or baptized persons. 3^d. *Confirmati*, confirmed members. They used to wait some time to see how persons behaved after they were baptized, before they admitted them to the holy mysteries.

And

* "It is to me a confirmation to observe *de facto* (says Mr. Mitchell) that in the way of successive baptizing the children of all that had a standing in the visible church (though with too much laxness and corruption for want of discipline) the Lord hath continued religion among christian people from age to age: Whereas the like continuance and preservation of true religion could not have been hoped for, nor probable in the contrary way. It was never heard of in the world from *Abram* ham to this day (since God appointed an entering sign,

"or

And I might prove the point from the practice of all churches, since; but it would take up too long a time.

2d. I would mention some maxims or principles of famous divines, which carry their own weight with them. As 1st. Baptism belongs to the disciples as such; the Lord's supper to *self-examining* disciples. 2d. Baptism is a sacrament of initiation or entrance into the church; the other of confirmation or growth in grace. 3d. Membership in the universal church gives a right to baptism; but membership in a particular church to the Lord's supper. Those that the Apostles baptized as it were at large, must be joined to a particular church before they could receive the Lord's supper. 4th. Covenant interest alone giveth right to baptism, but not to the Lord's supper. It is a great mistake to think, that the parents *immediate fitness* for the Lord's supper is the ground of baptizing their children; but it is the parents and so the childrens being in the covenant. We often have reason to think that some communicants are *unfit* for the Lord's supper; but we cannot exclude them from that ordinance or from baptism for their children, being neither heretical or scandalous. The reason is, because they are under the covenant. The same may be said in the other case. 5th. *That uncleanness* would debar from coming to the passover, which did not *unfit* for the other ordinance of circumcision.

"or such a *library* to be sworn by his people to distinguish them from the world;) that a people did continue for any length of time to be religious, who were either all, or the greater part of them *uncircumcised* or *unbaptised*. The laying aside of *circumcision* among the *Midianites*, (for they did by times lay it aside, may be plainly gathered from *Exod. iv. 24, 26*;) was quickly followed with the utter loss of all true religion among them, and other of the posterity of *Abraham* and *Keturah*. I know the bare having of baptism does not always keep true religion; but sure it is, that the want of it will quickly lose religion among a people. To say that a people may be religious well enough without baptism, would be to reflect upon the wisdom of *Christians*, in appointing such an *external sign* of *Christianity*, which surely was no needless thing. It is easy to see that in the way yourself and some others go, the bigger half of the people in this country will in a little time be *unbaptised*." Letter to *Inc. Mather*, p. 4. 5.

communion. These several particulars import, that we should not be altogether so *strict* in admission to baptism, as to the LORD's supper.

3d. I answer, "A man not joining to a particular church may be owing to the *weakness of his tender conscience*, which scrupleth his fitness for the LORD's supper; and yet would gladly have himself and his consecrated to the LORD, yea and rejoice to be under the government and laws of CHRIST in particular churches."

4th. If the knowledge of a man's good estate (as they hold) is a necessary qualification for the LORD's supper, it is his duty to stay away until he has this knowledge; and yet not neglect other duties in the mean time.

5th. If such persons are real and hearty in renewing covenant they will soon come further; if they are not, they had better remain where they are. It will be more for the honour of the church; for how often do those who are only under a common work of the spirit, lose their convictions, and (by their apostacy) become a scandal to religion and to the church that admits them? And hence we may see the impropriety of vehemently urging persons to come immediately into full communion, when they do not find a *freedom* in themselves to do it.

6th. We ought rather to encourage persons to come as far as they see light in the path of duty, than to lay discouragements and stumbling-blocks in their way. This is truly to *carry the lambs in our arms*.

II. It is objected, But if all baptized persons are members already, why do they own the covenant? Is it not that, that makes them members? I answer, no: A person doth not become any more a member than he was before by renewing the covenant. It is only a recognition or taking possession of his right in the manner the church thinks proper. It is like an officer's taking an oath for the faithful discharge of his office: It is not the *oath* that constitutes the officer, but the *commission* which he had before. There is no impropriety in calling all baptized persons *complete members*, as our ancient Divines and the Synod expressly do. Membership is a thing that cannot be increased or diminished; there is no *magis* or *minus* (more or less) here: A man is a member or no member; there is no medium: But their CAPACITIES OF ACTING are not the same; they may be widely

widely different. An infant or a communicant (become *non-compos*) cannot receive the LORD's supper; yet they are compleat members. And there is no such a thing as *half-membership* or *half-covenanting*, and it is injurious to use such an expression. But what advantage is it to renew covenant then? I answer, This is a *meer prudential* of the church, to make the more *deep* and more *durable* impressions on the persons concerned; to give them proper ideas of the solemnity of the affair; and also to impress on others a solemn sense of their covenant-engagements, by a repetition of the covenant in their hearing. They have the same end in it that whole churches have, when they renew covenant *openly* and *explicitly*, as the churches were wont to do formerly, and this church more than once in my Grandfather's days. But it never entered into their hearts, that they made any *addition* to their membership by it. So it is in the present case. I am sorry to see that this custom of renewing covenant is so misunderstood by many; they seem to have got a notion, that by renewing covenant they are made members. But this is a mistake; they are no more members than they were before: And the practice had better be laid aside, than to be thus abused by such gross apprehensions.

III. But it is further objected, it is only *grace* that gives a right to either seal; and therefore a person ought not to come until he knows his grace. I answer,

1st. This objection doth not reach the case of those that were baptized in infancy; but those only that come for baptism at adult age. The former are members already, and therefore if we go to *purge* the church of them, or refuse to let them renew covenant, (which is the same thing) let them be ever so blameless in their walk, we must go further still, and purge the communicants likewise (who renew covenant every time they come to the sacrament) and turn out all that we think have not grace, or that dare not say they are converted. And where we must stop, no man can say. In short, this is running directly into the most rigid principles of the *Separates*, who are for purging the church. We have no more warrant to cast baptized persons out of the church than communicants: And if we do the one we must do the other also, when there is the same ground for it, that is, reason to fear they are graceless. Indeed if *heresy* or *scandal* can be proved upon either sort, let them be cast out in God's name; but not otherwise.

2d. These Persons in question exhibit those *signs of grace* which our opponents set up as the *only standard* for the church to judge by. They explode an account or *relation* of experiences, at least think them unnecessary; and make profession and practice the only criterion of judgment. Thus Mr. Green, one of the *Connecticut* champions for the new scheme; he says in his late treatise, p. 57-8 "In the admission of persons, we are not to judge from the account of *inward experiences*: This is not laid down in scripture as the rule of publick judgment, but profession and practice." To this we entirely agree with respect to *baptism*. Why then will they not suffer persons of *regular practice* to renew the covenant, when they desire it? or in other words, to add profession to their practice, which (according to them, is all that is necessary; and so to have baptism for their children? this would put an end to the controversy.

Here, by the way, I cannot help observing, how ridiculous it is to insist that none but *gracious persons* ought to partake of the seals; and yet at the same time to say, that it is unnecessary to give an account of the *workings of grace in their souls*, which is what we call experiences. This seems to me to be a direct contradiction. Such an account is really *essential* to their scheme; and if separated from it, it falls to the ground; and they really (after all their noise about grace) take up with lesser evidences than we do in regard of the Lord's supper.

3d. If this doctrine be true, then it will follow, that no believer while in the dark ought to come to either ordinance, or even present his child to baptism; for then he implicitly renews covenant; which must not be done in a state of darkness. And what confusion would this bring into the church? We should have but thin communions, if the members every time they come must know they have grace.

4th. According to this scheme, no person ought to engage in any duty whatsoever, until he knows he has grace: For he is in danger of *lying to God*, or dealing *falsely* in the discharge of it; which is the grand objection in the present case.

5th. According to this scheme, *Hezekiah* and *Josiah* were to blame for bringing their people in general to renew covenant, when they had reason to fear that the greater part of

of them would come with a *ye* in their mouths, and they had better have let it alone.

6th. I have observed before; if persons know not that they have grace, yet are conscious of their sincerity in what they do, they had better come than stay away. And if they should be really destitute of grace, their coming will be less offensive to God than the omission would be. Reformation and renewings of covenant when only proceeding from a common work of God's spirit, have been a means of removing or preventing judgments, as is evident from many places of scripture.

And here I would mention one thing: I should be glad to hear as much of the danger of the *total omission* of these duties, as of the performing them in a *wrong manner*. The Jew that did not circumcise his child was to be cut off from God's people, i. e. put to death. But no such severe judgment was threatened against the unregenerate person, that circumcised his child. And *Moses* himself had like to have lost his life, for the omission of this duty.

7th. *John* the Baptist and *CHRIST*'s disciples did not ask those they baptized, whether they knew they had grace. But upon *their confession of their sins* and promising reformation, they immediately baptized them, *Mat. 3, 6*.

8th. If this church should agree to renew covenant at this day openly and explicitly as churches did formerly for the strengthening their covenant engagements, it would be proper and necessary to call upon all the children of the church to join with us in it, as our Fathers did, as we may find on our church-records. And who in this case would dare to forbid or exclude them, though they did not come immediately to the Lord's table? And if not why should they be excluded when they come *now by us*?

9th. If the knowledge of our good estate be necessary in order to partaking of the feast, it must amount to a *certain* knowledge. For how can a *mere hope* entitle us to it? How know we but it is the hope of the hypocrite? Suppose a king should give such and such privileges to persons so and so qualified, it will not do for persons to come and say they *hope* they have those qualifications; they must *certainly* make out to their own and others satisfaction that they have them, or they have no business to put in their claim. So that this doctrine is come to this at last, that
nothing

nothing but *full assurance* will warrant our coming either to baptism or the Lord's supper. And if we have this before we come, what need we come at all? At least we need not come for this end, to get our evidences and comforts strengthened; they being already come to their full strength.

IVth objection. But why do you exclude any baptized person at all from bringing their children to baptism, if they are all members? I answer, the reason is, because of their vicious lives. If a person be a liar, swearer, sabbath-breaker, whoremonger, &c. he ought to be dealt with, and if he remain impenitent to be cut off. In this case he forfeits his privilege. And this is the reason why persons are propounded, that if any know they are guilty of such things, they may object and get them excluded.

Vth and last objection. This will bring in impurity into the church. I answer, Diligent attendance to discipline, and not *curtailing the covenant* will keep the churches pure. The contrary doctrine rather tends to impurity: For persons, if debarred from renewing covenant and bringing their children, will be tempted from their great fondness for their offspring, to come too rashly to the Lord's table. And the church will likewise be tempted to be *lax* in their admissions, to prevent the complaints of such persons, and to remove the reproach that such swarms of children among them are in a state of *heathenism*.

Several other weighty considerations might have been mentioned, but I forbear. I shall finish with observing, That this was the principle of almost all the first Fathers in the country; my Great-grandfather Cotton, Mr. Norton, the famous Mr. Shepard, Messrs Wilson, Mather, Allen, Rogers, and many others. And the practice was recommended by a *Synod* of all the churches of the Massachusetts Colony in the year 1662. And it was agreeable to the sentiments of my Grandfather Cotton the former Minister of this church, as I find by a manuscript written by his own hand. And it has been practised by the generality of the churches for more than an hundred years past.

SECOND ESSAY.

Further CONSIDERATIONS illustrating the point.

1. **I**F the foundation be taken away, what will the righteous do? What signifies it to keep contending who are the church, or who shall or shall not be received, when the very foundation of the church is strack at, though not designedly? We are in reality no church, nor any of us members of a church, if this proposition be not true, *That those who are in the visible covenant have a right to the seal of the covenant for themselves and children.* The very being of the church depends upon it; the whole controversy turns here. If it be denied, our cause is betrayed to the Baptists, and we cease to be a church. If it be granted, then our opponents give up their cause, and the children in question are to be baptized. It is strange therefore that this way of arguing is so little taken notice of, when every thing dear to us plainly depends upon it.

II. Upon the same foundation I argue. If the church should vote to disannul this practice, I should think they wholly disannulled *infant baptism*; for the ground of it would be wholly taken away. If this way of arguing be not conclusive, *they that are in the covenant have a right to the seal of it for themselves and children*, there is no defence against them left, and we become downright Baptists without knowing it; at least we hold *infant baptism* by meer tradition, without understanding the grounds of it.

No doubt it will be said in answer to this, *That according to the constitution of the church, a person has no immediate right to bring his children to baptism notwithstanding he was baptized in infancy, until he has solemnly renewed the covenant; and this the church ought not to suffer until they are fully satisfied he has grace.* I answer, The foundation of this objection was taken away in my first Essay; in which I observed, 1st, That this renewing covenant did not make them any more members than they were before; but was only a taking possession of their right in the manner the church thought fit. 2^d, That this taking possession could not be denied them, unless *heresy or scandal* could be proved.

proved upon them. And now add, 3d. That no other evidences of grace are necessary with respect to those who are members already, than meer *negative ones*, unless the church assume an authority of purging the church upon the plan of the *Separates*. As negative evidences are sufficient in regard of those already in full communion, so also with respect to these in question. I also add, 4th. There is no *divine appointment*, that persons should renew covenant in this *explicit manner*, when they become adult; but it is a *meer prudential* of the church to make the more solemn impressions. Accordingly I find, that the two famous Mr. *Henrys* (Father and Son) did not propose any *explicit covenant* to baptized persons in publick at adult age: So far were they from thinking it *essential* to membership. And we read nothing of circumcised *Israelites* thus renewing covenant in order to partake of any of the privileges of that church. But yet there is great propriety in it for the end just mentioned. And if the church should order a general explicit renewing the covenant by us all every time we come to the sacraments or once a year, there would be nothing amiss in it, but it would tend to make the greater impressions, though not make us more members.

III. We find in scripture, that all the *Israelitish* nation, old and young, were baptized by God himself in the cloud and in the sea, 1 Cor. x. 2. Here the children of unregenerate persons had this sign administered to them by the highest authority; and it was afterwards blest to them, though the parents were cut off. From this we may infer, that it is not contrary to the mind of God that children of persons unregenerate should have this ordinance administered to them, if their parents be in covenant relation to him. This seems to be a type of what was to be done in gospel times. The Apostle plainly speaks of it in allusion to the christian baptism.

IV. I cannot be of the sentiments of those that are for altering the practice, unless I hold that baptized infants are no members; or if they were, they lose their membership when they grow up, unless they come to the Lord's table. They would be consistent, though not true. But to grant that they were members then, and continue members still, and as such ought to be dealt with for misdoings, and yet that their children are not members and have no right to the seal, is a strange inconsistency, and what can never be reconciled.

“As

"As all children are part of their parents, and make but one person, by the laws of God and men; so christian infants are one person with their christian parents, and make but one body with them, as the root and branches are but one tree; and this by divine ordination, and especially in obligations to duties, and right unto favours and privileges spiritual, so far as they are capable."

V. If the church should alter this practice, what would become of those who have already owed the covenant part of their children baptized and part unbaptized; when they have the same right they had before? A motley mixturs indeed, part of the church and part of the world. Here would be an excommunication with a witness.

But they may be remedied by looking upon them as persons in full communion, and allowing them without further ceremony to come to the Lord's table; But this cannot be right. For, 1st. This would be to give them a privilege which they neither ask for or desire, and perhaps will not consent to. Such may properly be called *pressed men*, not *volunteers* in God's service.

2d. To be members in full communion and not communicants is a contradiction in terms.

3d. Here will be some in full communion, that never made any relation of their acquaintance with experimental religion; which will either make two sorts of members in full communion, the one admitted without a relation and the other with; or it will cause the total laying aside the relation of experience; In the former case, what confusion will it make in the church, relations erected from one sort and not from the other? In the latter case, the total laying aside of relations would deprive the church of one proper means of judging of their good estate. Without some account of their sense of divine things we shall not know but all their religion is a piece of *mechanism*; merely external. We shall have nothing left to judge by but *likenesses of life*, which all acknowledge may be separate from grace; and as to many we should have no more than *negative* evidences of grace, that is, that we never heard any thing bad of them, their manner of life being little known to the greater part of the church, which must be frequently the case in great towns. This would do upon Mr. *Stoddard's* scheme, that the Lord's supper was a *converting ordinance*, and to be used, by re-

* *Leigh's* System of Divinity.

gular livers, as the other means of grace : But for those that hold that the church should receive none but *gracious persons*, for them to consent to abolish relations, and to make such negative and external evidences the only standard of judging appears to me a palpable contradiction. With regard to *relations*, I acknowledge that some of them are not very edifying, and others are too particular ; we do not want a man to give a history of his life : But for the Minister to pen down some of the principal answers to the questions proposed by him to candidates, expressing their sense of the evil of sin, love to *CHRIST*, and the like essential acts of grace would be far from being useless and unedifying, especially in some remarkable instances.

VI. The children of those in the covenant are God's ; *they are born unto me*, says God ; *they are my children*. *Exek. xvi. 20, 21.* That is, within my church and covenant. This is spoken of the children of unregenerate *Israelites*. Certainly then we rob God of his portion, if we deny them the seal ; and there will be no difference between the infants of such as are in covenant, and the infants of *Turks*, which is not to be admitted : God himself claims a right to the one, but not to the other.

VII. It is the *Baptist's* grand plea against baptizing infants, that they do not exhibit any positive evidences of grace. And how do these that are for the new scheme tally with them ? Negative evidences are sufficient in both cases. As baptism is a sacrament of *entrance* ; so the lowest degree of evidence is to be admitted in this case. Certainly fuller evidences are to be expected from those that are admitted to the table, than from those that only approach the threshold ; from *proficients* than *incipients* or first beginners at *CHRIST's* school.

VIII. Dr. *Taylor* and others inform us, that the *primitive church* administered the holy communion to newly baptized infants, after the example of the *Jewish church*, all their circumcised children eating the passover with their parents. This practice was as early as St. *Cyprian's* time, who lived about 240 or 250 years after *CHRIST*, and for aught appears much earlier ; and it was continued universally in the church above 600 years, and in some of the *eastern churches* it continues to this day. St. *Austin* writes in defence of it. But although we judge them wrong in this, because infants are incapable of examining themselves or of discerning

the Lord's body. Yet from this practice we may infer that it was their general sense, that baptized persons, merely by virtue of their baptism, were intitled to all church privileges, and that nothing but their open wickedness could justly debar them from it.

IX. Those who oppose this practice, lay the whole stress of the controversy upon this, that baptism is the seal of the covenant of grace; consequently, say they, none but *gracious persons* have a right to partake of it; and if they have grace, they ought also to come to the Lord's supper, which is another seal of the covenant; and it is wrong to admit any adult person to the one, without they will immediately come to the other: The seals are not to be divided.

It is granted on all hands that baptism is a seal of the covenant of grace. The Synod that recommended the present practice universally held this; and so did the two Dr. Mc-*thers*, Mr. Willard, and others, and so did Mr. *Lezards*, and yet they were all zealous for administering baptism in this latitude; they could see no inconsistency between these two principles. But how can they be reconciled? Ans. 1st. They admitted the *least* evidences of grace, even negative ones, and supposed them sufficient with respect to those already in covenant. And to prevent scandalous persons from bringing their children to baptism, they were always pronounced before hand, that objections might in that case be made against their coming.

2^d. With respect to those *without*, that offered themselves to baptism at adult age, they admitted the first dawning and glimmerings of *good* as intitling them to that ordinance; as we find John Baptist did, *Mat. iii. 2*. And the Apostle likewise. But they thought, that more solid, substantial,

What multitudes did John Baptize in *Ab. Judia and Jeru-
salem*, &c. went out to him, except the Pharisees, says the text; and yet how few true converts among them! They joined in his light but for a season. *John vi. 35*; the generality soon fell off. This shows that John was not very strict in his examination. As soon as any appeared to be affected with the sense of sin, and were brought to confession and promises of amendment, he administered the ordinance. And the disciples who baptized more than John, (*John iv. 1*) no doubt went upon the same plan. See this point further cleared by Dr. Inc. Mather in his treatise on the subject of baptism. p. 37.

and positive evidences of grace were necessary for the confirming ordinance of the Lord's supper, or that they should *bring forth fruit unto repentance*, before they partook of it. *Mat. iii. 8.*

Dr. C. Mather says, "The purest churches of the Lord's Jews, have generally not been so large, or so soon in the administration of the Lord's supper, as of baptism. One has been given as milk; when the other like strong meat has been withheld; and the infants usually detained the baptism a while before they were confirmed. 1. 3d. If after all they were really unregenerate, they held their baptism was no blessing to them or their children, but of use in various respects.

Before I leave this head, I cannot help expressing my surprise to hear the names of several Ministers mentioned as patronising the contrary scheme; when it is notoriously known that the sentiments of most of them were in large measure with respect to the subject of baptism; and I rather think it was so as to all of them, except Mr. Edwards, who was too apt to run into extremes. Though I acknowledge, that none of them agree with Mr. Stoddard's notion of the sacraments being *converting ordinances*; neither did the Synod, that introduced this practice into our churches. This, by the way, leads me to observe, that there are too controversial bleedings in this dispute, which should be carefully separated, though there is no occasion for me to do it at present, as both parties agree in this, that baptism is of larger extent than the Lord's supper.

Here for further clearing this point, we may observe, 1st. That though baptism be a seal of the covenant of grace; yet, as grace respects sinners, the virtue and efficacy of it is not confined to regenerate persons only. The sacraments are seals of the whole covenant; baptism particularly is a seal in these respects. 1st. It is a seal of membership, a badge of discipleship, to distinguish God's professing people from the world. 2d. It is a seal of the truth and reality of the covenant; it exhibits to sinners the certainty of a way of mercy. Circumcision which was of the same nature with baptism is called a *seal of the righteousness of faith*. *Rom. iv. 11.* That is, a seal of CHRIST'S righteousness, which is apprehended and applied by faith; it assures us, that there is such a righteousness provided for the relief of miserable sinners, and seals the efficacy

efficacy of it unto salvation : How encouraging then is this, to draw forth an act of faith ? In circumcision and baptism the truth of the covenant is sealed, which is a great means to begot in the soul a *perception* of the truth of it. " And if a man be but convinced of these things," says Mr. *Stoddard*, " he is gained."

" The sacraments," says another, " are not properly seals of *the truth of our faith*, but of the truth of the covenant ; they are only seals of our faith by consequence, because as seals confirm a thing, so faith is confirmed and strengthened by receiving ; but they are not, in a proper sense, seals unto any thing but the covenant." * 3d. As baptism seals a *sense* of our natural filthiness and pollution ; so it is a seal to bind us to seek to God for the spiritual washing. † 4th. It is a seal to assure us, that if we seek it in a right manner, we shall be washed in the blood and spirit of CHRIST. Many Divines hold, that baptism is a sacrament for the *beginning of life* in elect infants ; it is doubtless so to the children of the faithful, that die in their infancy. But as for those that grow up, it is a seal at least that they shall not only have the offer of CHRIST, but the *striking of his Spirit* ; which if not resisted will prove effectual to their conversion. And what an advantage is even this ? " The LORD will as surely," says one, " ingraft us into CHRIST and cloath us with his righteousness, as we have the outward washing, if we deprive not ourselves thereof by our own carelessness." † 5th. Baptism is also a seal of *showing blessing* to believers. And it even seals these to the unregenerate, though not *absolutely*, but *conditionally*. In all these respects baptism is a seal to regenerate persons, and in most of them it may be a seal to the unregenerate, and so of great use to them through the blessing of God. Circumcision was a seal to *Abraham* of saving mercies, but not so to *Ishmael*, and perhaps not so to sundry others of *Abraham's* family, which was numerous. In regard of these latter, it was a seal only in part ; that is, of the other things I just mentioned, which must be acknowledged to be a great benefit. Why then should we be so anxious to exclude every unregenerate person from this seal ?

Leigh.

† " One end of this ordinance is to quicken our dulness, and excite our diligence in performing gospel duties, viz. our endeavours to believe, repent and obey, in confidence of God's help and assistance." *Leigh.*

‡ *Leigh*, p. 918.

2d. Though baptism and the Lord's supper be seals of the same covenant, yet there is no impropriety of administering the one sometime before the other. And this in two cases especially; 1st. When the person has been very *ignorant* or *scandalous* before: In this case it is best to stay until they are better instructed, or give fuller evidence of their reformation, otherwise they may prove a great blemish to religion and the church. This the primitive church did. Or 2d. When they themselves are kept back by *fears* or *scruples*; so that the seals may be lawfully divided.

3d. If grace be absolutely necessary in order to baptism, what inference can be more just, and even natural, than this? *Then I must certainly know that I have grace before I come to this ordinance, or bring my children.* This consequence hangs like a dead weight upon this opinion, and can never be got over. All the talk about *prevailing hopes*, or any lesser degree of evidence still serves to make the contradiction the more glaring. Without I am sure, I have no business to come; the ordinance is not for me. All the *hopes* in the world never gave a man any right to one privilege, civil or sacred; it is the *qualification of itself* and our being able to make out with *certainly* that we have it, that intitles us.

But if I should grant for arguments sake that a lesser degree of evidence will do, how high must it rise? If it be *prevailing hopes*, what must become of the believer that hath *preponderating fears*? Surely he must stay away. If it be *lesser evidence* still that will be admitted, who then will be excluded? Surely none but those who absolutely know that they are unconverted; and we shall find but few that will own that, or that are wholly destitute of *hopes*. So that the door is opened as wide for almost every body to come as the most sanguine of Mr. Stoddard's followers could wish. This leads me to observe,

4th. That though Ministers appear to differ widely in their sentiments about the subjects of baptism, yet when they come to *practice* they nearly agree, and seem disposed on each side to admit the same sort of persons. Those in Dr. Mather's and Mr. Stoddard's principles both say, *That this ordinance is not to be administered to scandalous persons remaining such, or indeed to any that make open profession of their unregeneracy.* But here seems to be the main difference, the one take *blamelessness of life* with *profession* for evidence of grace; the other

do not, but suppose it may be separated from grace, and yet that we have no business to prevent their coming, because the ordinance is often blest to those in a state of unregeneracy. The difference then appears to be very small, or rather it may be looked upon as a meer *logomachy* or strife about words.

5th. I observe, That the children's membership is a *distinct* thing from that of their parents, though coming through their means, as is made evident beyond contradiction by the *Synod* and others of our Fathers; and to punish them because their parents do not immediately approach to the Lord's table is hard and injurious.

6th. Let baptism be called a *seal* or what you will, what reason can they assign why grace is more necessary in order to a persons bringing his children to it, than in order to praying, coming to meeting, &c? Prayer is a *seal* in some respects, and so is *hearing*; and all the *sacrifices* under the law were *seals* of the covenant of grace, as well as the *passover*. (So Dr. Watts expressly asserts, and it may be easily proved) And yet who ever dreamed of excluding all unregenerate persons from them? The sin lay not in performing the duty, but in performing it in a *wrong manner*, which is the utmost that can be said with respect to baptism.

7th. God himself hath *divided the seals*, as in the case of infants: And shall we make ourselves wiser than God, in saying the seals shall not be divided? And he also in some cases divided circumcision and the *passover*. And if they may be divided in one case they may in another, as the church hath thought in all ages, who have always been more large in the administration of baptism than of the other seal, even with respect to adults.

The case of *infants* plainly shews it to be the divine pleasure, that some *unregenerates* should be baptized; for he requires it to be done if they are under the covenant, and yet it is his pleasure at the same time not to give them, that is, most of them, the grace of the covenant, though there be no resistance or opposition on their parts. And it is the divine pleasure likewise that the church should be so constituted, that of necessity we are obliged to receive many adult *unregenerates* into it, let us be ever so careful and cautious. This thought pursued in its full latitude, and the genuine consequences from it duly considered, methinks might *ease the scruples* of any about administering the ordinance to such or give but slender evidences of grace: A prevailing fear of their unregeneracy should not pre-

vent it, if it be possible after all that they may have *the root of the matter in them*; but if the marks and evidences of unregeneracy be plain and open, and leave us without doubt, in that case *once for all* I declare my opinion, they are not to be admitted. This leads me to say,

Lastly, and upon the whole here, I apprehend none of the church would be uneasy if persons of some regular lives and behaviour could be admitted to bring their children, though such as are of a contrary character be excluded. Here prudence should direct, and caution should be used not to prostitute the ordinances to unmeet subjects. That *profane persons* are out of the question is granted by all. And if such should be shut out, it would remove the *reproach* of our having fallen from the method proposed by the Synod, who first brought in this practice into these churches. Which if true, is more owing to the *carelessness* of Ministers, than to an *alteration* of principles.

X. It has been suggested, "That the method we have been in has a tendency to hurt the candidates that offer themselves by promoting a *careless secure spirit*, which may be fatal to their best interest." This I rather think true of the contrary scheme. When a Minister hath peremptorily declared, that no unregenerate person ought to come to either sacrament, and hath charged them upon their peril not to come, and yet earnestly to urge particular candidates for baptism immediately to come to the Lord's supper is as much as to tell them that *he is fully satisfied they have grace*, though he doth not say so in words. And what is the tendency of this but to make them easy in their present condition without further examination? The corrupt hearts of many will flatter them fast enough with *hopes*, and having the *Minister's sanction* to back them, they will be in the utmost danger of being flaked down in delusion.

XI. It has been suggested further, "That we received this practice by *tradition* from our Fathers without *examination*, and have gone on in a *loose way* without being able to give any good reason for it." I answer, that neither our Fathers introduced it, nor we received it in this light manner. The question was started in the country soon after *grand-children* were born to the first comers, and the point agitated for twenty or thirty years by the ablest Divines, until at last the Synod of all the Ministers and churches, came to a solemn decision about it in the year 1662, after much prayer, study, and converse, and gave

gave such weighty reasons for it as were never yet answered. * Neither did many of their posterity receive it thus lightly: Mr. Leonard in particular had occasion and thoroughly studied the controversy, as appeared by several sermons on the point; and the same may be said of many others. And I am sorry there is such occasion to retort the argument; I am persuaded it is owing to the *superficial* remarks of some of our *younger Divines*, lately appearing in print, that this practice has been questioned, when as they had never thoroughly studied the *grounds and reasons* our *Fathers* went upon, or even the point of *infant-baptism*, which gives great light to the controversy, and is really the *foundation* it is built upon, so that they must both stand or fall together.

XII and lastly. The expedient to reconcile us, *viz.* For the persons in question to be admitted to full communion, and then for the church to dispense with their coming to the LORD's table for a while. I say this expedient proposed by the Pastor is quite unsatisfactory to me. For,

1st. This scheme goes upon this supposition, that *by renewing covenant they are made members*, which is wrong as I have proved before. All *baptized* persons are members, whether they renew covenant or no, and are under obligations to all christian duties. This renewing covenant is never thought to make persons members in other cases: When a church is embodied in a new parish they enter into covenant anew, but are no more members than before; and just so it is when churches renew covenant in order to promote a reformation.

2d. The term of *members in full communion* has been always appropriated to persons who *immediately* communicate, to distinguish them from those who do not communicate, though in other

* I suppose one main reason why *Plymouth church* did not join the *Synod* was, because they were without a Minister ten years together about that time; but the *Synod's* principles were certainly agreeable to some of the church as appears by the pious Secretary *Morton's* mentioning Mr. *Wilson's* dying speech with approbation in the *New-England Memorial*, wherein Mr. *Wilson* laments it as *one cause of God's controversy with the land that the baptizing of the children of the church was so much neglected*. And this was my Grandfather *Cotton's* principle, as I noted in my former Essay. Perhaps the reason why they did not practise upon it was, because none of this sort applied to have their children baptized. I find no motion toward it in the church-records.

other respects they are equally members. But by this new proposed method all distinction will be confounded, and to be members in full communion and not in full communion will be the same thing, which, as I observed will be a contradiction in terms; and it will make such confusion in language, that when we become habituated to this practice we should not be able to understand one anothers speech when conversing with those of another town about members in full communion. And what difficulty would it cause about a form of dismissal and recommendation, in case any of these new sort of members should remove to other towns before they communicated? Or must we set up ourselves as a model or standard for other churches to copy after our example, and that even without consulting them at all? Surely we have need of another Synod to advise, before we rashly run into this new scheme.

3d. This I look upon to be a right *Papish* dispensation, viz. a dispensing with the command of God, which is one of the worst things that we charge upon the *Romish* church. The utmost the church can do is *passively* to connive at those who are kept away by fears and scruples, and not to lay any censure upon them, which is the case according to the present mode. But to give open toleration, by an *actual* vote, for members to come or stay away at their pleasure is unjustifiable by any rules of scripture or reason.

4th. If our baptized members should be averse to this new method, as I rather think they will, and none should come, it will be just the same thing as if no door was opened to them at all: Or if they should like it, and should come in multitudes, then the church would be in danger of being overrun with a laxer sort of members who would carry all before them; for who would deny them the privilege of *voting* if they be members in full? And who would choose to have the affairs of CHRIST'S kingdom wholly in such hands, in the hands of *non-communicants*? For they would soon become the majority; or must we *bargain* with them not to claim a privilege justly belonging to them, until they actually communicate? Or shall we by meer arbitrary power without just warrant exclude them from *voting*? In that case they would not be members *in full*, but only *in part*, contrary to what the church promises them at their admission; or in other words, they would be only *nominal*, and not *real* members in full communion.

5th. How long must we *stay* with these new sort of members?

bers ? If they are limited to a *certain time* which they are not to exceed, then the church must censure them if they do not come within that time. And what confusion would this bring us into ? And even how *unjust* would it be, if the same reason subsists that hindered their coming at first ? If it be left to them to come when they think proper, this would be to leave the matter just as it is now, and they may stay away as long as upon the other scheme.

If it be said, this would give the Minister a *warrant* the more frequently to call upon them, I answer, not more warrant than he has by the present method. For these persons in-covenanting promise to *use diligence in their preparations for an access to the LORD's table* : And what better ground can a Minister or others have to stir them up to such preparations ?

6th. This method has a tendency to destroy all order, and to bring in the utmost confusion. For if we dispense with one, though he hath laid himself under immediate obligations to come, we may as well dispense with another, and so with all. What then would become of the communion ? Even those that are *now* communicants may think themselves warranted by such liberty given to absent themselves when they please : And how know we but by and by the effect of it may be that we should have no communicants at all ? And what a case would this be ? A church without communicants ? Many in full communion, and yet no communion ? Members professing to serve the LORD in all his ordinances, and yet no ordinances ? What an absurdity to open such a door as this ?

7th. In this new scheme all the same difficulties recur, which are objected to the present method. This is a *half-way* practice as well as the other : This *divides* the seals as well as the other, which has been declared " unwarrantable and unlawful : " This equally encourages unregenerate persons to come : This has a like tendency to keep persons along in their *mistakes*, in their doubts and scruples as the other mode : This as fully tolerates persons in living in the *neglect* of " one essential duty of the covenant," as it is called, as the method proposed by the *Synod*. In a word, I know of nothing that may be objected against the present practice but what with equal force militates against the *way* proposed. It is called indeed by a *new name*, but that does not alter the nature of the thing ; the styling them members in full communion does not make them one jot the more so, than if they owned the covenant in the common form.

8th. There

8th. There seems to be a downright inconsistency in this way of covenanting. They *doubt* whether they *ought* to come to the LORD's table in their present circumstances, and yet they *must* promise to come : They are to promise it, and then the church will dispense with the performance ; or in other words, will allow them to *break their promise for a while*, or perhaps as long as they live if the *same reason* continues, that is, if they do not get over their *doubts* before. How jarring and incoherent does this appear upon the bare mentioning : For my part, I think they had better not *immediately promise*, than not to *perform*. These promises *in futuro* are looked upon in other cases as meer evasions to avoid a present duty ; like a sinner's promising to repent hereafter, which he has no thoughts of at present. And then further, as they promise it to God as well as to the church, they must have God's *dispensation* as well as the church's, or they are obliged to come *immediately*, notwithstanding any thing the church can do. *When thou hast vowed a vow unto God defer not to pay it. Ecc. v. 12.*

9th. The introducing this new scheme will either cause the wholly laying by a *relation of experiences*, or this new sort of members must submit to this practice, or we must have two different methods of admitting persons to full communion : And great inconveniences would arise by either of these different ways. With respect to *relations* I have spoken before. I would only add, that if these non-communicants in full communion should be obliged to bring a relation, I believe it would as effectually put a stop to their coming, as any of the most rigid methods the church could possibly take : I dare say we should have no members of these sort : They would carry their children to other churches that are not so strait.

10th. The most material difference between this and the present method seems to be this, that in the one case the covenant is proposed *twice*, and in the other case but *once* : Which, it is strange to me, should occasion any *scruples of conscience*, since it only adds to the *solemnity* of the affair, and does but little, if at all, diminish their obligations of coming to the LORD's table ; in the one method they promising diligently to seek *preparations* for it, and in the other, that they will come when they have got over their scruples, and are better satisfied that they are prepared for the ordinance ; which certainly is the same thing in effect : And there is as much danger on the one side as the other, of their using it merely

merely as a *formality*, especially after a while, to get their children baptized.

As for the suggestion, that by this *two-fold repetition* of the covenant, persons are led into the mistaken notion, that there are *two different covenants*, and that the first is of a *laxer* nature than the last; it is impossible for a person that hears both *forms* read rationally to entertain such a thought; but if any of the weaker sort are in danger of it, they may be easily set right from the pulpit, or by conversation. As for their being made *twice members* by it, enough has been said before, when it was observed that this renewing covenant does not make them members, &c.

11th. If the difficulty lies here, *the proposing of the covenant twice*, as being thought superfluous and unnecessary, for peace sake I should not object against the first proposing of it being wholly laid aside; I mean with respect to those already in the covenant or persons baptized; and that they, after being propounded a competent time and no objection made to their lives and morals, should be allowed to bring their children to baptism. Though after all I should be sorry to see the church abate any thing from the solemnity of the affair, which certainly is of good tendency both in regard of the candidate and spectators, and intitles the former to the prayer of the church, &c.

Upon the whole, I should be glad of any proper expedient to remove the difficulties among us, and to preserve peace and harmony; but as for the expedient under consideration, I cannot see my way clear to come into it at present. And if the majority of the church should approve of it, I am afraid that we should become *an object of ridicule* to the whole country for our *singularity*, and for our introducing such an inconsistent jumbled scheme, which was never heard of in the churches before this day; and even now I do not find it so much as hinted, that above one church practises any thing like it.

T H E

T H I R D E S S A Y.

SOME THINGS have occurred to my mind since the last church-meeting, relating to the subjects of baptism.

1. I shall take notice of some positions that have been advanced, and objections made.

1st. It is objected, that many make a *formality* of the practice merely to get their children baptized. Answer. I fear it is too true. But how shall this new regulation remedy the difficulty? If this door were entirely shut, is there not as much danger of making a *formality* of the Lord's supper rather than their children should go without baptism. But as to some there is no doubt they do it not *formally*, but *sincerely*: And shall we keep them away, because others abuse the privilege? For my part, I am of my Great-grandfather Coston's mind, that it is better to admit ten hypocrites, than to exclude one sincere child of God.

And I would add, if they are such persons who make a formality of it that chiefly come to renew covenant for their children's sake, how comes it to pass that the door is opened for their admission to the Lord's supper? For it hath been once and again said, that the purport of the new scheme is to *enlarge and not to curtail and diminish their privileges*, viz. by obliging them to come immediately into full communion.

2d. It is objected, Mr. Leonard's great difficulty in bringing in the practice, and that he was seven years about it. I answer, Mr. Leonard was indeed so long about it; but the reason was not because he could not gain a major vote before; for he had the major part of the church with him, (I think) at first, at least for years before the point was brought to a publick decision. But this arose, 1st. From his *prudence* because he would not grieve two or three respectable members, but would wait until he had gained their acquiescence at least. 2d. In this he acted according to the ancient practice and constitution of this church. For in the records we find they would not vote in affairs of importance, especially in alterations of any part of worship, until they had gained the consent of every brother, at least so far as to acquiesce in the church procedure. These were the real causes of his delay in putting it to vote.

And

And if any thing may be argued from Mr. Eraser's being seven years about it, it is this, that we ought to be as long at least in considering before we call this practice out, proceeding in the same gradual manner, and not to do any thing of such importance rashly and in haste.

3d. It is said our Fathers of this church admitted not the practice. I answer, they admitted that upon which this practice is grounded, that is, they admitted all the children of the church to *renew covenant* in a body, and that more than once, without coming to the Lord's table. Which is farther than our Pastor would have us go. And I appeal to him, after they had gone so far, whether they ought not to have gone farther, and baptized their children, as he does now the children of them who have formerly owned the covenant.

The Rev. Mr. Thaxter of Middleborough after such general renewing of covenant in his church, baptized all their children without any further step; and perhaps our Fathers would have done the same, if any of these renewers of covenant had applied to have their children baptized, which does not appear from the records that ever they did. Further, I find they had higher thoughts of infant's membership than many now a days have; they looked upon them as members; they dealt with them as such; they dismissed and recommended them to other churches when they removed, and sent admonitions after them, if not dismissed, when they misbehaved.

4th. It is said that none but visible Christians or Believers, should partake of special privileges. I readily grant it, and say, that all baptized persons are visible Christians or Believers, unless they carry the Devil's mark, a *profane life*, or are known *infidels*. This and nothing else should exclude them from the privilege of baptism, if they ask for it. If we can prove by scripture marks to the satisfaction of the church, that they are wicked persons, or if they make an open profession of unregeneracy, that is, know and acknowledge themselves to be unregenerate, we desire not their admission. It would be preposterous indeed to apply Christ's seal to those that are visibly the Devil's children, and own themselves to be such without any compunctions of conscience. But if we have only fears and scruples about them and cannot say but that after all they may have *some good thing in them toward the Lord*, as *Aijah* had in the house of *Jeroboam*, how dare we shut them out or say they shall not do their duty as far as they at present see light for it? Read *Matt. xviii. 6*.

It seems to me that the distinction between *visible* and *invisible* believers is too much blended and confounded in the present dispute. If it is *visible grace* only that intitles in the sight of the church, then all the talk about *real grace* is nothing to the purpose.

5th. It is said, if visible grace entitles to the seals, why ought we to make a distinction, and admit some to one ordinance and others to both? I answer, 1st. That it is the candidates themselves generally speaking, that make the distinction, and not the church; and we ought to admit them to the discharge of their duty as far as they see light to go, and not to lay stumbling-blocks in their way. 2d. I am fully of Mr. Robbins's mind, that baptism as well as the Lord's supper are seals of the covenant of grace. But the consequence he draws from it I deny, that baptism and the Lord's supper are of *equal extent*. It is and has been my settled principle and practice, to be more strict in admissions to the Lord's table than to baptism. And I have the example of almost all churches from the beginning to patronize me in it. If there be but a *bare possibility* that a person has grace, I think he ought not to be excluded from baptism for himself or children. But *more positive evidences* of grace were necessary for the Lord's supper. And this for several reasons: These two among the rest; 1st. Because baptism is a sacrament of *entrance*, but the Lord's supper a sacrament of *growth*. 2d. Because if afterwards they were backsliders, it would bring less reproach on religion or the church than if they were admitted to full communion.

6th. It is said that the persons in question have only an *infant-membership* which differs from that of the adult. I answer, it differs not in the *essentials* of it. All membership comes by *divine institution*; and is as *real* membership, and as *complete* in the one as in the other, that is, in the children as in the parents. *Paul* was as real and complete a *Roman* citizen as the *Chief Captain*, though the one came to it by *birth* and the other by *purchase* at adult age. Original sin comes in a different manner from other sins, *viz.* by the mediation of our parents, yet it is as really a sin *in us* as any that we actually commit. The like may be said in the present case. But after all, if it be a reproach to have only an infant-membership, we may easily take it away by this church's renewing covenant, as our ancestors did, and calling upon the children of the church to join with us in it in a body. And then surely none will deny them to be adult members.

II. I shall now make some OBSERVATIONS for the further clearing the point, &c.

1st. I think this is a point of the greatest importance that ever came before this church. The question is, whether our children shall be treated as outcasts, as strangers to the covenants of promise, or in other words, as Infidels, as Pagans, without God in the world and without hope! If the act establishing this practice should be repealed, I should look upon it that all our children are this day unchurched and excommunicated, and that the church hath nothing more to do with them in a way of discipline. The brethren had need consider what they do before they act: Your children are no doubt dear to you; and will you, blindfold, this day cast them out of the heritage of the Lord? Will you with your own hands, lifted up to Heaven, *deliver them to Satan*? I cannot possibly put any other construction on the matter: They must either be within the church or without; either *dogs*, or *lambs* of CHRIST'S flock: If they are *within*, that is, members, they are certainly entitled to some privilege; and what privilege have they left, if their children must not be baptized? Did we not learn this in our earliest infancy, *that the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized*? But if they must be dis-covenanted and cast out after all, I cannot help turning myself to them, as many such are present, and saying to such as are of good conversation, as in *Isa. lxxvi. 9. Your brethren that cast you out, for my name's sake, said, let the Lord be glorified; but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.**

2d. But why are we to do this? The plea or pretence is *grace*. But I dare say it will be found a most *ungracious* scheme in the issue: It will bring in a carnal generation into the church, I mean into the number of communicants: Other doors being shut they will after a while rush into it as the horse to the battle, rather than not have their children baptized. And Ministers and churches will be more lax in admissions, rather than to have a generation of *heathens* growing up among them. This it seems begins already to be the case, where this alteration takes place, as some serious people complain.

3d. I would query, whether it is probable *Abraham* had grounds to think that *all* his numerous family were converted, when

* The reason of this *apostrophe* was, I had been informed of two or three that had applied to own the covenant, but were denied, though at the same time urged to come to full communion.

when they entered into solemn covenant? *Gen. xvii.* and whether he would have been justified if upon his fearing the contrary, he had withheld the seal from them? *Abraham's* family was the only church in the world, and a type of the gospel church; and what was done in it, ought to be done in gospel times. We should not be stricter than *Abraham the father of the faithful*, especially since we are, in the *same covenant* with him, *Rom. iv. and xi. and Gal. iii.*

4th. If this new scheme takes place, the next step may be a total laying aside of *relations*. This it seems is done in *Connecticut*, by the most zealous promoters of this new method. And *Mr. Robbins* owns, that it is matter of indifference, or at least, that a church may be rightly constituted without them: If so, they may be laid aside. And what will be the consequence of this? Why, 1st. the knowledge of *experiences* will be left to the sole cognizance of Ministers: And must the church trust implicitly to them? 2d. The church will have nothing left to judge by, but external evidences. And then, as to many, they will have only *negative* evidences: And as to the candidates most known, *blamelessness* of life will be the sum total of the evidence. Every one that can say with the *Pharisee*, *I am no extortioner, unjust, &c.* or with the young man, *all these have I kept, &c.* must be admitted to the Lord's supper. What then will become of the scheme of *real grace* being essential? Or how will they free themselves from inconsistency, as I noted before?

5th. I would observe, that the *Synod* were of the same mind with *Mr. Robbins*, that it is *real grace* that entitles a person to the ordinances in the sight of God, and that it is *visible grace* that entitles them in the sight of the church; and yet they administered baptism in this latitude: They could see no inconsistency between these things; and how came we at this day to be more clear-sighted?

6th. Further, with respect to the *Synod* that introduced this practice generally, (for it was introduced by some particular Ministers and churches before) I would observe two things. 1st. The famous Ministers that came into the country at the first settlement were most of them alive and present at the *Synod*, and mostly joined in it. And those that were dead, as my Great-grandfather *Mr. Cotton*, *Mr. Sheppard*, and others, were for it, as appears by their writings. And as for those Ministers that opposed the *Synod*, they afterwards almost to a man fell in with it, inasmuch that *Mr. Mitchell* in his letter to *Dr.*

Luc.

Inc. Mather, five years after the *Synod*, tells him that he was *left almost alone*; And he afterwards fell in; from what motives his writings tell. 2d. I think it an observation of some weight, that the *temptation* that lay before our Fathers was rather to be too *rigid* than *lax* in admissions. For they were justly and greatly offended with the church of *England*, from which they had just broke away, for their admitting every one, yea the profane to gospel ordinances, as members of the national church. This is one of the reasons they always give of their seperation, *viz. promiscuous administrations*; And yet they so far got over their prejudices as to come into such a result as we have in the *Synod-Book*. And as to Mr. *Davenport* in particular, the grand opposer of the *Synod*, we find in his life, that he was not only prejudiced by the loose administrations in the church of *England*, but by what he saw in *Holland*, when he was Minister there; they requiring his baptizing all children belonging to his assembly, let their parents or guardians be ever so ignorant or scandalous, which he refusing, was forced to leave his ministry among them, And he was afraid if he joined with the *Synod* it would come to this at length in *New-England*. As to President *Chauncy* the other great opposer of the *Synod*, (formerly Minister of this church) we know how *rigid* he was about the dipping of infants; he would neither baptize them in the common way himself, nor suffer it to be done by other Ministers, which occasioned his leaving this place. No wonder then that he was as *rigid* in the present case. These two with Dr. *Inc. Mather*, were the chief opposers and writers against the *Synod*; but Dr. *Mather* altered his mind, as you have heard.

7th. I think it a good observation of the worthy and ingenious Mr. *Neal*, who was formerly in *New-England*, (but now or lately a Minister in *London*) in his *New-England History*, speaking of the *Synod* in 1662 he says, "I must confess for my own part, that it looks but like an odd assertion to me to call a person a member of a church, who hath no right to any of its privileges, and yet remains exposed to its censures." A strange sort of membership indeed!

8th. If the church must be purged in this sort, that is, so considerable a number of members must be declared incapable of any privilege, and in effect dis-covenanted. I would move that the church would begin higher in this purging work. Let us begin with the communicants; let all be examined; let them be asked one by one *whether they have grace, or whether they love the Lord Jesus in sincerity?* And if they have not
assurance

assurance of this, or good evidence, let them be rendered incapable of any privilege or discovenanted until it is otherwise with them. In a word, let us turn down-right *Separates*, and set up a pure church, this would be acting consistently, and not turning our artillery against the weaker part of the members only.

Lastly, As to the manner the church should act in this affair. I would ask the members, as it were one by one, whether they can say upon their consciences and according to the word of God, that the practice is wrong and erroneous, or in other words, that it sprung from Hell? If the major part can say this without any doubt or hesitation upon their minds, I would ask farther, what right the scripture gives them to impose their sentiments upon their fellow-members, who think the practice agreeable to the will of God? Ought there not rather to be some way found out in which our consciences may remain inviolate, and none of our christian rights invaded, and we continued in communion together in charity and love? And is not the method I proposed at the last church-meeting of this nature?

Whether the major part of the church be for or against the practice I know not, having conversed with but few. But if any alteration takes place, I apprehend two things necessary.

1st. That those who vote for the alteration should have clear evidence, if not assurance of their own regenerate estate. The new plan supposes it necessary that all candidates for baptism or the Lord's supper have such evidence. And shall candidates be excluded by those who have it not themselves? As our Saviour said, *He that is without sin let him cast the first stone*; so I say, let him that hath good evidence of his own gracious state *cast a stone* at our baptized members; and let none else presume to do it by voting in this case. If they do they condemn themselves; they pull the *mote* out of their brother's eye, and leave the *beam* in their own, contrary to our Saviour's command; they require that of others, which their consciences tell them they are destitute of themselves. And what an absurdity is this? What a presumption? What a self-condemning mark? It was to such cases as this the Apostle had reference in *Rom. ii.*

1. Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself.

2^d. The other thing necessary is, that the church should be unanimous in the alteration, at least that all opposition should cease.

Our

Our church records inform us, " That before any vote was called in affairs of importance, care was always taken to gain the consent of every Brother : And in case any could not actually vote ; yet expressing, that they could rest in the act of the church, it was satisfying : And this was a great preservation of the peace of the church." This is the constitution of the church. How then can this practice be abolished, when about half the church at least, are zealous for it ? This would be an imposition with a witness ; such as was never heard of, since the church had a foundation.

But how is it possible then, that this affair should ever be settled ? I answer, it can be settled no other way, than by mutual toleration and forbearance. The church may, if they think proper, passively acquiesce in Mr. Robbins's *forbearing the practice*, until he hath more light to act in the affair. This is the utmost that they can do, without a general concurrence and consent, or while our different sentiments remain.

And if the church thus far condescend to Mr. Robbins, I think at least he ought as far to condescend to those of different apprehensions ; that is, by passively acquiescing at baptism being administered among us by other Ministers, as has been already proposed, and not to imitate Mr. Chauncy in his rigidity, or lay stumbling blocks in the way to prevent or discourage Ministers coming. Thus by mutual forbearance, the affair may be peaceably accommodated, and no violation of conscience on either side. But if the matter be drove on with violence, who can tell what the consequence will be : God only knows.

And I would finally say, that if a vote of repeal be obtained, it would be null in itself, unless by a *previous vote* the constitution of the church be altered, and a new constitution established, wherein the major part should have a right granted them of ruling the consciences of their Brethren ; which God forbid should ever be the fate of this once famous, but now declining church.

A M E N.

This third Essay was delivered to the church at their fourth meeting on this affair, March 31, 1772. The same week on Friday evening I received the following Letter from Mr. R-----

Plymouth, April 3, 1772.

" Sir,

" I Was called to go to Middleborough the day after our church-meeting, and the Fast being the next day prevented

" vented me until now communicating to you some thoughts
 " relative to what was read, as well as said at said meeting ;
 " But there is this advantage has arisen from it, *viz.* I have
 " had more time, and opportunity to think and to weigh mat-
 " ters in my own mind. And on the whole, I am still of
 " the same mind I was, that what you read in your *last Piece*
 " was a most *injurious, unchristian, ungentleman-like, gross mis-*
 " *representation* of the sentiments of your brethren who are on
 " the other side of the question in debate. You, Sir, do cer-
 " tainly know, that neither I nor they hold to such things
 " as you there advanced as being our sentiments ; neither can
 " any of your frightful consequences be with the least appear-
 " ance of justice or fairness, drawn from our principles. To
 " what purpose then, were these passionate exclamations and
 " pathetic addresses to the people, both church and congrega-
 " tion, but to prejudice their minds against us and our opin-
 " ions, without any scriptural or rational grounds ? Is this a
 " *fair or christian treatment* of your Pastor and Brethren ? Can
 " you think either to carry your point by such methods as
 " these ; or if you could, that it would be upright and agreed-
 " ble to the mind of CHRIST ? You, Sir, have more sense, I
 " am persuaded, than to imagine men of tolerable penetration
 " can look upon such *popular harangues and appeals to men's*
 " *passions*, as sound reasoning, or fair scriptural argumen-
 " tation. However I find that notwithstanding its *seeming affec-*
 " *tionateness* and popularity, it has been far from accom-
 " plishing the end for which you must have evidently design-
 " ed it. For I have heard numbers speak of it since, and those
 " of your side the question too, who are by no means pleas-
 " ed with it, nor with the manner in which it was delivered, but
 " spake of it with great dislike ; And I rather think your
 " cause, which I am persuaded is not the cause of God, will
 " suffer by it. I think, Sir, you have reason, as a Christian,
 " also to reflect, whether your being so free in dealing out im-
 " plicitly the curses of God's Book upon those of us who
 " think differently from you was quite agreeable to that meek
 " and lowly spirit, which becomes the followers of the LAMB
 " of God. It appears to me, when you come *calmly* to reflect
 " upon it, it must excite penitential shame, and be matter of
 " deep humiliation before God. It no doubt flowed from
 " the heat of your zeal to support your cause, and to prepos-
 " sess the minds of the multitude in favour of it ; but I think
 " it very ill became a professor of godliness, I presume you
 " could

" could not be so inconsiderate as to imagine to *affrighten* your
 " opponents by such a *misapplication* of scripture. However,
 " I think, Sir, it is truly an awful thing when God's word is
 " *wrested* to serve the purposes of any party *merely* : More aw-
 " ful still when men attempt to turn God's artillery against
 " his own cause and interest, as I think, has been too much the
 " case here, though not designedly. I mean not, as was hinted
 " above, to attempt to terrify or *affrighten* you hereby, but
 " only pray that it may excite in you reflection and serious
 " thought. It is no small satisfaction to me, Mr. Cotton, to
 " find, that *most* of those Christians among us, *both men and*
 " *women*, who are justly looked upon to live near to God,
 " and to enjoy *most* of the life, power, and sweetness of expe-
 " rimental religion, are on our side of this question. I much
 " question whether you have four women in the whole church
 " with you, which I think is of some consideration in this af-
 " fair, though they cannot vote. I am sensible, Sir, indeed,
 " and believe you are aware too, that your's is the most
 " popular side of the question.

" The *practice* you attempt to support, and the *argument*
 " made use of, do perfectly accord with the natural pride of
 " the unregenerate heart, and their self-justifying spirit and
 " disposition. It *relishes* exceedingly well with the genera-
 " lity of men, to hear that *baptism* in infancy and negative
 " evidences of grace are enough to ground a christian char-
 " itable belief that such persons are good folks, and may be
 " admitted to *covenant* with God : Whence they will naturally
 " conclude their state is safe enough, in spite of all the mi-
 " nisterial instructions and warnings that can be given them.
 " It suits graceless hearts *special* well to be told that un-
 " regenerate men may safely say, they *know* the Lord
 " *for their* God, &c. as you publicly asserted in your first
 " Piece. * This is laying a broad foundation with a wit-
 " ness

* Having omitted the argument in my first Piece, in which the
 passage here referred to, is included, because it comes in more
 properly in my last Piece, I think it best to insert the pas-
 sage here, lest Mr. Robbins should make a noise about it.
 It runs thus, " Returning *Ephraim* uses this plea with God,
 " when he begs for converting grace, *Turn thou me, &c. for*
 " *thou art the Lord my God.* Jer. xxxi. Not that he
 " thought

"ness for sinners to build their false hopes upon. How-
 "ever, this I must tell you, Sir, that so long as I have my
 "senses, by divine help, I will oppose to the utmost of my
 "power, such notions, both respecting doctrine and disci-
 "pline, and that however solemnly, passionately, or seri-
 "ously they are advanced, or let the names or characters of
 "their propagators be what they will. Neither can I in
 "conscience encourage the instructions of those who
 "hold and advance such doctrines among a people, the
 "charge of whose immortal interests is committed to me.
 "The *direct* and *unavoidable* tendency of your opinions, as
 "they have been here discovered, appears to me to over-
 "throw the grand *calvinistic* doctrines of the gospel, and to
 "establish the most dangerous tenets of the *Arminians*. For,
 "notwithstanding any precaution you can use, they will in-
 "evitably be led to think there is something in a graceless
 "sinner that is pleasing to God; that he is not quite so bad
 "as many have represented him; that he is not an utter
 "enemy to God and Christ and the covenant, but has
 "some good thing in him, at least, towards the Lord
 "God of Israel. But it is needless for me to enlarge on this
 "head at present. The *most* godly amongst us plainly see
 "these to be the consequences of your arguments and plan,
 "as it has been hitherto pushed. For, whatever may be
 "urged, it is too evident that those who do in these days
 "practise the *half-covenant* or encourage baptized children
 "owning covenant, &c. in the common way, have wretch-
 "edly deviated and gone off from the original design of
 "the

"thought that he had a special saving interest in God at
 "this time; (he was far from thinking so) but what he
 "means is, that God was his God by covenant relation:
 "He was early dedicated to God by circumcision, and
 "therefore he begs of God, that the blessings of the cove-
 "nant may be imparted to him. And, by the way, this
 "may answer the argument that is brought from those
 "words used in our covenant at this day, *you avouch the*
 "LORD JEHOVAH *to be your God*; a man may safely say
 "it, though he has preponderating fears that he is not con-
 "verted. If a sensibly distressed sinner may use this ex-
 "pression in prayer to God, he may as well do it upon any
 "other occasion, though he dare not say or think he has
 "grace."

" the Synod. But enough has been said of this in publick.
 " As to the poor plea of making *Pagans, Heathens, &c.* of
 " our children, it appears to me it is as *wicked* as it is un-
 " *reasonable* to call those who have been born and brought
 " up under the gospel, and still enjoy ordinances, calls,
 " means of grace, &c. to call them, I say, *Pagans*, merely
 " because they are destitute of the outward badge, though
 " *precious privilege* I own, of *discipleship*, * that is, remain un-
 " baptized ! Is this the return of thanks we give to God for
 " the precious gospel and means of salvation, to call those
 " that enjoy them, if unbaptized, *Pagans, Infidels, and Hea-*
 " *thens* ? I have not so learned to speak, I acknowledge, of the
 " gift and mercy of God to poor unworthy sinners.

" On the whole Sir, I trust it is in vain for you or any
 " one else to pretend to urge the plan, or attempt to support
 " a scheme, which I am satisfied, never had the least foundation
 " in scripture : For *magna est veritas et prevalebit*. And to
 " have one church-meeting after another, I am persuaded
 " will be of no significancy. The Brethren's eyes seem to
 " be more and more opened ; and not only their's, but others
 " of the congregation too. So that I sincerely hope and be-
 " lieve all struggles to keep alive a practice unwarranted by
 " the word of God will be in vain. The more I think of
 " it and canvass the arguments and methods taken to sup-
 " port it, the more satisfied I am, that they can never finally
 " avail to keep it in existence. I am always for *peace* when
 " consistent with *purity*, and none shall strive more for it ; but
 " if *repugnant* to it, I would contend earnestly for the *latter*,
 " though the consequence should be a diminution of the
 " former.

" With proper respects, I am your Friend and Servant,

C. ROBBINS.

" P. S. When I mention in the above, " *the most godly*
 " among us," as being grieved at the conduct of those who
 " are so strenuous for the *half-covenant*, as it is called, I by
 " no means intend, or would be thought to intimate, that I
 " think these of our brethren of your way are not truly god-
 " ly

* If baptized persons are *disciples*, then they ought to have
 the privilege, the *precious privilege* of all disciples, viz,
 to have their children baptized as well as themselves.

"ly, and I hope and trust real friends to CHRIST in heart,
 "though I think not in their judgment in this point. But I
 "allude there more particularly to the godly amongst us,
 "whose circumstances are such as renders it impossible, most
 "of them, to be very active, or vote, &c. in the affair.
 "I mention this to avoid any imputation of uncharitableness."

C. R.

The ANSWER.

Plymouth, April 9. 1772.

SIR,

I WILL not be led into a paper controversy; neither my present hurry of business, nor inclination will permit it. One answer for all. I read your long Epistle with astonishment and surprize, and all the while I was reading, my conscience told me, *that I was not the man.*

You represent my discourse at the church-meeting as a meer popular harangue and appeal to men's passions, as if this was the main scope and substance of it. I have looked it over carefully and find little of this nature contained in it. It consists of eleven pages, and about ten of those eleven are taken up in reasoning closely, as I thought, on the point, or in relating matter of fact respecting the Synod, Mr. Davenport, Mr. Leonard, &c. or in declaring the constitution of the church, and what was proper for the church to do in the matter, &c. And I scarce know what you refer to, except it be what I said about our children's being excommunicated, and my quoting Isa. lxvi. 5. As to the latter, you may remember that I addressed those baptized persons only who were of good conversation, not the profane; and herein I had respect particularly to Mr. Ichabod S---, and one or two more, whom I had heard you would not admit to own the covenant, and yet were willing to receive to full communion. It was, I suppose, my mentioning this text, that occasions your asserting that I was free in dealing out implicitly the curses in God's Book upon those who thought differently from me, for I find nothing else that looks that way. Whether any curses were thus denounced, a brief paraphrase of the text will discover: it runs thus, *your Brethren that (hated you and; these words I left out because in no sense applicable)*

applicable) *cast you out* ; (this was really the case in my apprehension) *said, let the LORD be glorified.* This is the very thing you urge, that the new scheme is for the glory of God. *But he shall appear to your joy.* (That is, Providence will keep the door open for your admittance) *and they shall be ashamed.* That is, they shall be convinced of their error in being so strait, and conviction is always accompanied with shame. This was my real intent and meaning in using this text, and the sense, I believe, in which the hearers generally took it. But taking the text in a greater latitude, I do not see how it can be called a *dealing out of God's crosses* against you or your adherents. As to the propriety of my mentioning this text, (in the allusive sense in which it was meant and taken) I have not the least doubt. But as to the prudence of it, that is another question : It might perhaps be an imprudent step because it tended rather to irritate than enlighten. As to my charging you with sentiments, which I know you disclaim, I know not what you mean, except my saying, "The new plan supposes it necessary that all candidates for baptism or the Lord's supper have clear evidence, if not assurance of their regenerate estate." Whether you hold this or not, let your Sermons speak ; except one, wherein you endeavoured to remove the scruple arising from 1 Cor. xi. 29. In which you brought down the terms so low, that scarce any need be afraid of coming. How you can reconcile this to your other Discourses, I know not.

If you further mean, that I charge you with a *direct design* of excommunicating the children of the church, I charge you with no such thing ; but that it is the direct consequence of your opinion, I then and now, and I believe always shall assert. And I held up this consequence before you, that you might see the absurdity of your opinion. What can be more natural than such reasoning as this ? " If the act establishing this practice should be repealed, I should look upon it that all our children are this day unchurched and excommunicated, and that the church hath nothing more to do with them in a way of discipline. I cannot possibly put any other construction on the matter : They must either be within the church or without ; either *dogs*, or *lambs* of CHRIST's flock : If they are *within*, that is, members, they are certainly entitled to some privilege ; and what privilege have they left, if their children must not be baptized ? Did we not learn this in our earliest infancy, *That*

"the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized." You yourself must necessarily see the force of this way of reasoning, and would readily own the consequence to be unavoidable, if baptized persons adult were members of the church. But this you now deny, although you owned it in all our church-meetings formerly ;* and you must of necessity deny it, to be consistent. And in this you accompany Mr. Davenport and a few others formerly, and Mr. Belamy and some more in our day, though contrary to the sentiments of all churches and almost all Divines in all ages.

You say, that you think the cause I maintained will suffer by my management of it: If so, so much the better for you. You say, you mean not to attempt to terrify or affrighten me: I am not so easily affrighted out of my duty. You say, that *the most experienced Christians* among us are on your side. Ans. I do not pretend to judge the heart; but I apprehend you are mistaken here. And in your comparisons, I think you are guilty of great uncharitableness and censoriousness; and I must in faithfulness tell you that I verily fear, you converse *too little* with your flock to pass any judgment who are the most godly and experienced Christians, or who enjoy most of the presence of God and the sweetness of religion. You say, that you do not think there are four women in the whole church with me. If this be true, which I question, this shews that you are more a favourite with the women than I am, but does not prove your point. And here I would observe, as far as my knowledge reaches, or I have information, that there are very few, if any, men or women, but would be easy and contented to have the practice continued, if they were not afraid of grieving or losing you. You say, "that it perfectly accords with the pride of the unregenerate heart, to hear that baptism in infancy, and negative evidences are sufficient ground for christian charity." What I assert is, that negative evidences are so far sufficient, that if a baptized persons, of whom the church knows nothing amiss, should desire to own the covenant, or in other words, to take possession of the right given him in baptism, the church could not regularly deny him. Is this such a dangerous doctrine as you represent, and attended with such dreadful consequences?

You

* Which is the reason why I never yet attempted fully to prove that point.

You add, "it suits graceless persons special well to be told, that unregenerate men may safely say they avouch the Lord for their God, &c." I did not use the word *unregenerate*; but what I said was, that a man may safely say it, who has preponderating fears that he is not converted; as *Ephraim* did in his prayer for converting grace. *Jer. xxxi. 13. Turn thou me, &c. for thou art the LORD my GOD. He avoucheth the LORD for his God, while he verily thought himself unregenerate. He did this upon account of his covenant relation, or early dedication to God in circumcision. And suppose any other sinner, sensibly distressed like him, should use the like words, while he thought himself destitute of grace, would this be a profanation? Or would it lay a foundation for him to build false hopes upon? A mighty foundation indeed! The premises are, God is my God, because I was early given to him in baptism; the consequence according to you is, therefore I may safely conclude I have grace. If you draw such consequences as these, it is time for you to go to school again, to learn better logick. And by the way, this text in *Jer.* confutes your notion of infant membership's not remaining at adult age.*

Next follows your thundering *Anathema*, authoritatively denounced against me, for advancing such pernicious, soul-damning, destructive doctrines. "I cannot in conscience, say yee, encourage the *instructions* of those who hold and advance such doctrines among a people, the charge of whose immortal interests is committed to me." That is, in other words, I forbid your preaching any more in my pulpit or parish. But why so? It follows, "The direct and unavoidable tendency of your opinions, as they have been here discovered, appears to me to overthrow the grand *evangelic* doctrines of the gospel, and to establish the most dangerous tenets of the *Arminians*." So that it seems I am not only inclined to the *Arminians*, but am become at once one of the worst sort of *Arminians*, without knowing it, establishing their most dangerous doctrines. And if so, certainly unworthy, not only of *ministerial*, but of *christian* communion. Mr. *Robbins*, I must tell you, I scorn the charge; I know what is *Arminianism* as well as you do, and am as free from it as yourself. And you might with as much propriety call me an *Arian*, a *Muggletonian*, yea, a *Deist* as an *Arminian*.

But you forgot, that while you were drawing this charge against me, you equally involved my Brethren in the same charge,

charge, who all think as I do, and, saving the quotation from *Isa. lxi.* which I take wholly to myself) are as verily guilty as I am, and some of them more so, who carry the point of baptism much farther than I do: So that here is not only a virtual excommunication of our children, but of half the church at once. And this was not done suddenly in a passion upon the breaking up of the church-meeting, for which some allowance might be made, but deliberately after three or four days consideration, and immediately after a day of solemn Fasting and Prayer, in which we might justly expect our passions would be composed. I cannot think Mr. Conant advised you to this step.

But, Mr. Robbins, what is worse than all, you were all this while condemning yourself: For you are certainly more for resting upon outward evidences than I am, as a passage in my last Piece will evince, which, I omitted as well as some others, because it grew so late: The words are these, "If this new scheme takes place, then the next step, I apprehend, will be a total laying aside of *relations*." And so on in the same terms as it is expressed in the fourth observation of the third Essay, p. 30, 31, which I desire the reader to turn to.

You know that Mr. Green, your favourite Author, whom you read at church-meeting, explodes experiences. He says, "In the admission of persons we are not to judge from the account of inward experiences, this is not laid down in scripture as the rule of publick judgment; but profession and practice." Mr. Bellamy accords with him, and I suppose others of your plan in *Connecticut*. And some of this church know, that you have always spoke slightly of *relations*, and wished them laid aside. The church then, according to you and your Brethren, must regulate her judgment solely by practice, that is, external evidence, whether negative or positive it matters not.

This with you is a sufficient foundation for christian charity, without any knowledge of their experiences, that is, on the part of the church. Here then I might exclaim, "This perfectly accords with the natural pride of the unregenerate heart, and their self justifying spirit; this relishes exceedingly with the generality of men to hear that baptism
" with

* The reason of this clause was, because Mr. R----- went to *Middleborough* the day after the church-meeting.

“ with profession and a moral regular practice are enough to ground a christian charitable belief that such persons are good folks, and may be admitted to *covenant* with God : Whence they will naturally conclude their state is safe enough, in spite of all the ministerial instructions that can be given them !” And so as to all the sort of the dreadful consequences, which you attribute to my scheme. Mr. Robbins, who is the *Arminian* now ? When experiences are set aside, what is all this but *Arminian evidence* ? But be not affrighted ; after all, neither you nor I are *Arminians*. But all this, *hapsly* sprung from a strange confusion of ideas, or from not duly distinguishing between what is proper evidence for the church to act upon, and what for the party or candidate himself, which are certainly different, at least in part, as I doubt not you will acknowledge, when you come to consider.

You further say, that “ Ministers and churches in these days have wretchedly deviated from the design of the *Synod*.” If this be the case, which I question, why did you not endeavour to restore the practice to the original design of it, and not seek the total abolition of it ? This, I doubt not, might have been easily effected without one church-meeting. It lay entirely in your own breast whom to propound or not ; and I make no doubt you would have been so large in your *practical charity*, however strict in your *notional or speculative*, that there would have been but little objection ; but few persons, I believe, especially those of note, would have been excluded : But it seems the door is shut against every one, let him be *ever so well qualified*, unless he sees his way clear to come to the *Lord's table*. How in this case you can read such texts as that, *Mat. xxi. 6*, without trembling, I cannot imagine. And here I would advise you not to keep perpetually harping upon *qualifications*, as if this was the chief point in dispute : If this was yielded to you, another grand point remains, whether it be not sinful to exclude any from the privilege of baptism whom we could charitably receive to the *Lord's supper*, merely because they scruple their fitness for that ordinance ? This I look upon as a greater point than the other.

You next charge me with *wickedness* in calling them *Pagans* and *Heathens* who were never baptized or made any profession, although they come to meeting, or have opportunity for it if they will. Wherein the *wickedness* of this consists, I know not : Divines frequently do it. Mr. Watson, in his
body

body of divinity, calls the children of such, *sucking Pagans*. Scripture instances may be adduced. You almost every Sabbath make them *worse* than *Heathens*, in saying, *they shall have a more aggravated d. om.* Yea, if I remember right, you either in direct terms or in effect called them *Heathens* in treating from Jer. x. 25. But supposing the phrase *improper*, how can it justly be called *wicked*?

As for your concluding triumphs, as if certain of the victory, and that your scheme will finally prevail; read 1 Kings, xx. 11. But I hope it is not victory that either side is seeking: but truth. There are some other things in your Letter that deserve animadversion; but I forbear.

Upon the whole, I look upon your Letter as a most unchristian and injurious reflection on me and on a great part of the church; and as you profess yourself a Christian, I think myself in duty bound to demand satisfaction for the following articles. 1st. Your assuming, lordly, imperious style throughout your whole performance; contrary to 1 Tim. v. 1. and 1 Pet. v. 3. 2d. Your styling my last Piece a most *injurious unchristian, ungentleman-like, gross* representation of the sentiments of the Brethren, &c. without assigning wherein. 3d. Your charging me, more than implicitly, with a crafty, hypocritical, deceitful way of carrying on my cause, as you call it, as if being conscious of the weakness of it, I took such *passionate* and *popular* methods to gain my point. 4th. Your charging me with *wresting* the word of God to *serve bad purposes*. 5th. Your charging me with *wickedness*, for calling those *Heathens* or *Pagans*, who remain unbaptized and never made any profession of religion. 6th. Above all, your charging me with *Arminianism*, and with the grossest sort of *Arminianism*, such as is destructive to the souls of men, &c. And this without the least foundation. 7th. The judgment you pass upon me; that I had rendered myself totally unworthy of all ministerial communion by what I had done, so that it would be a most dangerous thing to the souls of this people to let me preach or *instruct* any more, and what you could not in *conscience* do: Which judgment, if right, renders me as unworthy of *christian*, as of *ministerial* communion. 8th and finally. That my Brethren appear to be involved in the same doom, who *stood by* and *consented* to what I said; universally approving it, as far as I can learn, except that passage in *Isaiab*; so that they must be as *gross* *Arminians*.

Arminians, &c. as myself. These things I charge you with, and hope, "when you come calmly to reflect, will excite penitential shame, and be matter of deep humiliation before God." And not only so, but induce you to make due acknowledgments to your injured Brethren. In expectation of which, I subscribe myself your real Friend, as far as you will suffer me to be so, and humble Servant,

J. COTTON.

P. S. I cannot but think, that *one design* of your writing this Letter, and the *timing* of it, was to prevent my coming to the *sacrament*; so that you have begun to *purge* the church already, as is indeed necessary upon your plan. And I am really suspicious, that you had a further reach in this Letter than barely to vent your resentment. Mr. Robbins, let me ask you seriously, Have you not a mind to get away from poor Plymouth? And have you not some favourite parish in view? I would not be ancharitable; but your several *provoking* Letters to the Precinct Committee about your salary, without just grounds; the open declaration of your Brother; some hints of the same nature from your Father; your refusing any method of accommodation; your management at the church-meeting, and especially this last stroke, which affects not me only, but above half the church and congregation. I say, all these give grounds of suspicion, that there is something of that nature in view; I cannot otherwise account for your conduct.

I desire to know how it comes about that six or seven lines of your Father's Letter to me are erased. It is not done with the same sort of ink that your Father used, but with ink exactly resembling your Letter. Are such proceedings fair or handsome? If you send any account to *Connellicut*, I desire you would send a full copy of your and my Letter, and not let it go in that hideous dress in which it has been hitherto represented.

Looking over your Letter more critically and comparing passages, the charge of *hypocrisy* and *deceit* appeared to me more glaring and gross than ever. Is not this the whole scope and run of your first page? "I grossly and wittingly misrepresent your sentiments, say you; I charge you with what I know you do not hold; I draw *unfair* consequences from your opinions; my passionate exclamations and pathetic

sic addressees designed to prejudice people's minds, unjustly,
 against you and your opinions; my treatment of you unfair
 and unchristian; I sought to carry my point by methods not
 consistent with uprightness; my discourse a *very popular ba-*
rricade and appeal to men's passions, destitute of scripture or rea-
 son; my affectionateness but *seeming*; I had missed of my
 evident design, viz. to carry my cause by noise instead of ar-
 gument; men of but tolerable penetration could see through
 my management; I endeavoured to prepossess the minds of
 the multitude by ways ill becoming a professor of godliness;
 I misapplied scripture; I wrested God's word to serve the
 purposes of a party; you believe I was aware that I was on
 the popular side, &c." All which put together amount to
 this, that I merely acted a part; that all was but grimace
 and farce; that my discourse was calculated to impose upon
 the auditory; that I endeavoured to make them believe what
 I knew was not true; that knowing myself destitute of ar-
 gument I substituted in their room *passionate exclamations, &c.*
 to answer my purposes and gain my point. In a word, that
 I was a designing, finished hypocrite, endeavouring, Lawyer
 like, to gain that by craft, which I knew I could not by *scriptural*
argumentation and sound reasoning; but that after all I was
 frustrated in my evident design. And in addition to this, I
 note, that while (in your Postscript) you are expressing some
 little charity to the misled Brethren of my way, as you term it,
 you express none for me; having before given me up as a soul-
 destroying Arminian and a deceiver, unfit ever to preach any
 more. Mr. Rabbin, what gross uncharitableness is here? What
 assuming the prerogative of the Almighty? The
 rankest Separatist never exceeded you in censoriousness. It is
 strange that my earnestness in urging what I verily thought
 to be an immortal truth of CHRIST should have such a *base*
 construction put upon it by a professor of godliness. I
 might with as much propriety apply these epithets to your
 fiery headstrong zeal and management. But I have not so
 learned Christ.

I also remark, your amazing confidence as if infallibly certain
 you had truth on your side. St. Paul himself, with his in-
 fallible spirit, could not be more confident. How unbe-
 coming is this? What vanity in a raw unstudied * young
 man,
 * If he had not been *raw and unstudied* in controversial di-
 vinity, he would have known better than to have charged
 me with *arminianism, &c.*

man, who has almost the whole christian world against him, and near all the first Fathers in New-England? Certainly more diffidence and humility becomes you; especially since you have heretofore been obliged to retract opinions, that, for years, you were as confident of as this, and that you had preached up with zeal and emphasis, and even with *passionate exclamations*. I mean those doctrines you had learned from *Bel-lamy*. You must indeed judge for yourself; but such assumption is intolerable.

I would also inform you, for I find you but little read in history, that while you are branding me with destroying *calvinism* you yourself are flying in the face of *Calvin*; for he was against you in this point of *baptism*, as appears by the articles of the *French Protestant churches*, which were drawn up by him, and afterwards enlarged by his advice and approbation.

April 12. * I observe you prayed in the morning with words redoubled, *That Ministers might not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, and so withstand error in doctrine and discipline, &c.* † I would observe upon it, that if you make not faster progress in declaring the whole counsel of God to this people, it will require near the age of *Methuselah* to do it. Since there are, I believe, fifteen twentieths or more of the heads of divinity that you have but little or nothing touched upon. † Look into a Body of Divinity and you will find it so.

Y. C. ---
Mr.

* This Letter was finished April 9, but not sent, because Mr. Robbins was at Boston, and he not returning until the latter end of the week. I would not serve him as he did me, to send it just before the Sabbath; so that he had it not until Monday morning April 13, which gave me opportunity of writing this on the Sabbath Evening.

† The words were spoken in a sort of fever, as his manner is when moved, *Let them not shun, let them not shun to declare, &c.*

† I aver this to be fact, that he hath not particularly handled the greater part of the heads of divinity, and it is in my power to prove it, as I have all the texts he has preached from, set down in my interleaved Almanacks. This has been

Mr. ROBBINS'S Answer to the preceeding Letter.

Plymouth, April 14, 1772.

“ Sir,

“ I Received your very obliging, polite, calm, and ingenious
 “ Letter yesterday morning, and noted the contents : Am par-
 “ ticularly pleased to find it so free from an “ *assumed, lordly,*
 “ *and imperious style,*” which certainly must be an instance of
 “ great condescension in one of such eminent erudition and su-
 “ perior knowledge, when speaking or writing to a “ *raw, unsta-*
 “ *died young man,*” and one so “ *little read in history.*” Had I thought
 “ it would have been such *assuming* and arrogance in me to pre-
 “ sume to write to you, Sir, I do not think I should have dared
 “ to have done it. But I must say, I never knew before that it
 “ was a crime, or would be looked upon such presumption in
 “ me to communicate my thoughts freely to you, or make re-
 “ marks upon your publick conduct and writings. * What I
 “ wrote to you contained my real thoughts of your LAST PIECE.
 “ I thought verily it was my duty to write it ; I did it not in
 “ *passion or anger.* I considered myself as one that had the charge
 “ of the souls of this people committed to me, and who must
 “ give an account of the various parts of my ministerial con-
 “ duct. I considered the things you advanced, as being of
 “ *dangerous tendency* to the souls of this people ; and I *still am*
 “ *of the same mind* : I fully believe their tendency to be, to
 “ subvert some of the *grand doctrines of the gospel* and of *calvin-*
 “ *ism,* and to establish some of the most dangerous tenets of
 “ *Arminianism* ; and therefore should be guilty of the greatest
 “ unfaithfulness to God and them, if I did not oppose them.
 “ And to oppose them behind your back, without opening my
 “ mind freely to you, I and you might justly look upon as
 “ mean, base, and unchristian. These, therefore, are the consi-
 “ derations, that moved me to write to you, Sir. I acted con-

“ been matter of grievance to me for years ; so that my men-
 “ tioning of it was not a sudden ebullition of passion, but
 “ what I thought necessary : For, if men will bring their
 “ passions with them into the pulpit, especially in prayer,
 “ they must expect to hear disagreeable truths.

“ Mr. Robbins told one of the Brethren, that in the first part
 “ of this Letter he followed the example of *Elijah, viz.* in
 “ his treatment of *Baal's* Prophets.

" scienciously and I think uprightly. " *I withstood you, because*
 " I think, you was to be blamed ;" I think so still. And
 " should look upon myself as a *poor soldier* indeed in the mi-
 " nisterial warfare, if I was afraid to oppose and expose *error*
 " merely because it came from one *superior in age*. As to the
 " grand point in dispute, I am sure I have seen no cause
 " to alter my opinion, from your last Letter. As to the con-
 " struction you put upon many parts of my Letter, besides your
 " *misquotations*, which are many, I would only say, that
 " it is very far from my meaning or intention ; however,
 " if you choose to construe and understand it so, I cannot help
 " it. As to some *inconsistencies* in your Letter, though they are
 " glaring, it might give you some *pain and uneasiness*, perhaps,
 " to have them pointed out, and therefore I *forbear*. As to the
 " Brethren being involved in the same *doom*, as you call it, and
 " that they *universally* consented to your *doctrines* in this matter,
 " the contrary is so notorious to almost the whole town, that
 " even you yourself, Sir, if but moderately conversant with
 " the people, cannot think it worth while for me to make any
 " reply to it. * As to the ungenerous, as well as unjust asser-
 " tions about my *Father and Brother*. I think you, Sir, and
 " whoever else may have assisted you with intelligence, might
 " have taken pains to be better informed, before you asserted
 " it. I choose to say nothing here of ingratitude on your part,
 " Sir. As to my having a mind to leave " *poor Plymouth*,"
 " as you call it, I choose to say no more about it, after you and
 " the church and others have heard me declare, that such suspi-
 " cions are without the least foundation in truth. As to my
 " designing to prevent your coming to the *sacrament*, I had no
 " such thought in my heart. As to the many *low, mean reflections*
 " upon me in your Letter, about *going to school*, &c. I acknow-
 " ledge that I am too "*raw and unstudied*" in *furrility* to make
 " any adequate answer to them, nor would I return *railing for*
railing.

* What he meant by this I know not. My assertion is as
 true, as that there is such a man as *Mr. Robbins* ; but this
 is agreeable to his usual policy. He had a mind to detach
 me from my Brethren, and make them believe that they were
 no way concerned ; that they might leave me *alone*, or al-
 most alone, to be worried by him at his pleasure. All his
 endeavours of late seem to center in this point.

" railing. As to the last part of your Letter, which was wrote upon
 " the Sabbath, and which is as full of the Spirit of the Letter as any
 " other part; all I say is, I think you might go to the house of
 " God with a better temper of mind than to carp and find fault;
 " especially in our joint solemn addresses to Heaven. And I do
 " not wonder you stayed from the sacrament, if you felt the same
 " temper then, that you did at this time. As to " *declaring the*
 " *counsel of God*," I have cause enough to be ashamed before
 " God for my great barrenness, unfaithfulness, and unprofit-
 " bleness: But as to man, I think my people have no just
 " cause to find fault, when I have done my utmost to discharge
 " my duty in that regard. As to several articles of charge
 " you mention in the last page of your first Letter, if what has
 " been said above is not a sufficient answer to them, I can hard-
 " ly look upon it my duty, Sir, to make further reply to them,
 " until you discover a spirit somewhat different from that
 " which runs through great part of your Letter. For though I
 " am less than the least of God's Servants, and far inferior in
 " age, knowledge, and grace; yet you ought to consider, that
 " Providence has placed me in some respects in a station above
 " you, and such as demand respect from you, in as much as I
 " am, through the providence of God, your Pastor, as well as

Friend and Humble Servant,

C. ROBBINS.

A Reply

I could give many other instances of Mr. Robbins's great mark-
 ness and forbearance. Take a sample of a few. His frequent
 and audible *bisping*, when he sat as Moderator, as my se-
 cond Piece was in reading; his praying, at the opening of
 the last church-meeting in June, *That the wild bear out of*
the wilderness might not be suffered to worry and devour the
stock. His declaration at the same meeting, upon reading
 my last Piece, *that I darkned counsel with words without*
knowledge; his giving me the lyre at the same time; his
 pointed *Psalms*; his Sermon of triumph in July, after
 the church had committed the power into his hands, (which
 is since recalled) from *Isa. lii. 17*. In which he shewed
 how the *enemies* of the church sought its destruction: viz.
 by promoting false profession; by prejudicing people's
 minds against their Ministers by sowing discord among them,
 then, by magnifying the infirmities of the godly &c. All

which

A Reply to this last Letter, wrote immediately.

Plymouth, April 14, 1772.

SIR,

I TOLD you I would not enter into a paper controversy. But I must tell you, that you have not answered my Letter: You cannot answer it: You dare not attempt it. And I impute your answering me in the manner you have done, (which is after the model of *L. Bryant*) to a *consciousness* of your *inability* that way: And rest,

Your Friend and Servant,

J. COTTON.

P.S. I know no more harm in writing on the Sabbath Evening a line or two, than in marrying people, or in spending the Evening in trifling discourse.

This Letter was sent back opened.

On these Letters I remark,

1st. That it was the first of these Letters that began our personal difference: Before this, we held a good correspondence, notwithstanding our different sentiments about baptism; and might have done so still, if he had managed the controversy with argument instead of abuse; And whether I gave him sufficient ground for turning the dispute into this channel by the preceding Essay, I leave to the Reader's consideration.

2d. What could be Mr. *Robbins's* real motive in writing his first Letter? His excuse is, that he had not time to answer my Piece at the church-meeting, it grew so late, which rendered it necessary for him to write. If this was the case, why did he not argue the point like a man, and endeavour to refute

which his adherents took to be levelled against those that were differently minded from him. To which we may add, his usual phrase in common conversation, both now and heretofore, when speaking of those who will or will not humour him in all his notions. "*My friends and my enemies*," &c. &c. These things I mention, not so much to expose him as to prevent the like for time to come.

H

refute me, and not write like a *Mamus*? Or did he think it too great a condescension for one in "*a station so far above me*," for one of his superior penetration and sagacity to deign to argue the point with such a mean Antagonist? Why, in this case, a silent contempt would have been the most proper answer. Or did he write merely to vent his indignation? He tells us, "he wrote not in a passion." Or did he do it purposely to pick a quarrel with me? This surely could not be the case with a man of Mr. Robbins's consummate meekness, a grace that he has so much recommended of late; or was it done to chastize me for my presumption in daring to oppose a man of his consequence? This, I dare say, he will not own. Or did he write to terrify me from any further opposition? He says, in his Letter, "he meant not to attempt "to terrify or affrighten me." Or did he think it best to finish the controversy with a butcher-stroke to knock me down at one blow, (to use a vulgar phrase?) These things I must leave. The real motive of this conduct is beyond my penetration: It fills me with surprize every time I think of it. As to the second Letter, the design of it is not so mysterious; it is apparently to let me know the superlative contempt he had for me. There is certainly nothing in either Letter that tends to administer conviction, if I had been ever so wrong; nothing but a torrent of abuse, a rumbling sound of hard words; an overflow of gall and bitterness. If I had wrote such Letters to Mr. Robbins, I should have been afraid to walk the streets. This leads me to ask,

3d. Which has written with the greatest asperity? Mr. Robbins says, "*I have wronged him in my Letter thirty times more than he has me in both his.*" Here it must be remembered, that he began the quarrel, and if, by his reflections and abuses, I have been provoked to speak sometimes too harshly, he may thank himself for it, by giving such needless provocation. But how do the reflections on each side appear upon the comparison? Why, if what he says of me be true, I am certainly a *grand knave*, and a *dangerous beretick*, wholly unfit to instruct or preach any more. But in what light have I represented him? Why, the whole amounts to no more than this, that he has partly forgot his school logic; that he is no great Divine; that he is not so much conversant in history as some scholars are; that he does not visit his people enough to know who

who are the *most* experienced Christians ; that there are many points of divinity that he has never fully and particularly handled ; that he hath spoke slightly of *relations*, not of *experiences*, as he is pleased to turn it, which I never accused him of ; that his discourse was a *rhapsody*, &c. If these things be *true*, where is the fault of telling him of them in the *manner* I have brought them in ? which I desire may be noticed. If any of the particulars be magnified beyond bounds, or the expressions too strong, is the injury done him a thousandth part so great as the injury to me ? The difference, I apprehend, is as great, as between the scratch of a pin and a stab through the vitals. Surely, if any one, that was an utter stranger to us both, should read his Letters, and know no more of me than what is contained in them, he would think me a vile wretch indeed. And if they do me no hurt where I am known, no thanks to him.

4th. What satisfaction is proper in this case ; and whether the satisfaction offered be sufficient ? As Mr. Robbins has brought *particular* charges against me, I think the satisfaction ought to be particular, and that a general acknowledgment, or amnesty, is not sufficient to answer the gospel rule, &c. But what satisfaction has been offered ? Mr. Robbins offered this in *general*, upon our meeting with some Brethren, refusing so much as to talk of *particulars*, viz. " You think I have injured you, and I think you have injured me thirty times more by your Letter : Let us make mutual concessions to each other ; let us bury the hatchet, and forget and forgive, and for the future live in love and peace." Here is no acknowledgment either general or particular ; but only a bare proposal to let the matter drop, without saying any more about it ; or in other words, to make something of a ballance, and leave off on equal terms, with intimations at the same time, that he thought it a condescension in him to come down so low. This was the case ; and yet I understand I am much blamed by many for not making up on these terms, and represented as *unforgiving implacable*, &c. Even the pulpit has not been free from censure. If I had accepted this, it would have been an implicit concession. 1st. That I was wrong in ever manifesting any dissatisfaction at all. 2d. That the charges against me were well grounded and just. 3d. That I acquiesced in the doom he had pronounced upon me, as unfit to *instruct*, &c. And 4th. That

That I had really wronged him, and that in the degree he mentioned, or at least in equal degrees, when I was not conscious I had wronged him at all. In short, the terms offered appeared to me a further insult, rather than any thing that looked like acknowledgment. If he thought proper to insist upon a general making up, what less could he have said, than that his Letters were *rash, hasty, and unguarded*, and that he was *sorry* that ever he wrote them? Or something of the like tenor; but not so much as this, could be obtained.

But I am weary with remarking, and would give myself and the Reader some relief, by proceeding to the next *Essay*; in which, if I have treated him with greater severity, in publick, than before, I trust I have not exceeded christian bounds; if I have, which I am not at present conscious of, I desire to stand corrected.

T H E

FOURTH AND LAST ESSAY.

QUEST. **W**HETHER the practice of this church, respecting the subjects of Baptism be warrantable?

The Affirmative further urged; *June 30, 1772.*

I. I shall endeavour to remove some of the mountains that have been laid in the way, or in other words, to solve some difficulties that have been newly alledged against this practice.

1st. It is said, that the baptism of children, and of adult persons is of quite a different nature; persons baptized when adult are indeed compleat members, and have a right to all church privileges by virtue of their baptism; but it is not so with respect to baptized infants; their relation to the church at first is but incompleat and partial, and meerly mediate; all the end and intent of it, is *to lay them under bands to be the LORD's* when they grow up; but they are not entitled to the least privilege by virtue of their baptism; and when they come to years of understanding, their relation to the church, or this incompleat membership, if it may be so called, wholly ceases, let them be ever so serious and regular in their lives, unless they make it their own act by taking the covenant personally upon themselves in a *gracious manner*.

This position I look upon as absurd and irrational and directly contrary to scripture. That childrens membership is of the same nature, as full and compleat and as lasting as that of persons baptized at adult age, and that they can forfeit it no other way but by bad principles or vicious lives, may be proved by the following arguments.

1st. From the *nature of baptism*, which is, according to all Divines, the door of entrance into the church. And if it is the door of entrance, then certainly all baptized persons, whether admitted in infancy, or adult age, are members, and there cannot possibly be any specific difference between the membership of the one and the other. The scripture no where assigns any such difference; and shall we be wiser than God? The following scriptures may further illustrate this point. As 1st. The Apostle says, *Gal. iii. 25, As many as have been baptized into*

into CHRIST, have put on CHRIST ; that is, have put on the profession of his religion ; they are become members of his church ; they are in visible covenant relation to him : Let them be children or grown persons, their standing in the church is the same. This place seems exactly parallel with that, 1. Cor. xii. 13. *We are all baptized into one body ; we are all, whether infants or adult, received into the bosom of the church ; we are equally become parts of this body, which is but one.*

Again, the Apostle tells us, *Eph. iv. 5.* There is but *one* LORD, *one* faith, *one* baptism. But according to this new notion, there are *two* baptisms specifically distinct ; the one only lays persons under bonds, but the other entitles them to all privileges ; which is certainly absurd. This new doctrine, if true, would infer the necessity of rebaptization. Accordingly, Dr. *Inc. Mather* observes, that rebaptization is the necessary consequence of it : “ For it seems,” says he, “ according to this plan the covenant which the child was in when an infant is become a *meer* nullity ; so that now being adult, he must not renew his covenant but enter into a new and other kind of covenant, which he was never in before : Now it is necessary, that when a man doth enter into covenant, he should be initiated by baptism. There was lately a set in the world, as Mr. *Baxter* tells us, who upon this very ground, although they did acknowledge baptism of infants as lawful, yet did rebaptize themselves when adult.” Thus Dr. *Mather* ; subject of baptism, p. 65.

2d. We may argue this point further from the nature of the covenant. This includes the children equally with the parents ; their visible covenant relation is the same. Accordingly the Apostle says, *Rom. xi. 17.* *If the root be holy, so are the branches.* That is, according to all our Divines that are for infant baptism, if the parents, who are the root, be federally holy, that is, in covenant with God, so are the children, which are the branches, equally so : The relative holiness of the one and the other, are of the same nature and extent, and not specifically distinct : They are equally church members. If it is said, that by the holiness of the root is meant *real* holiness ; consequently the holiness of the root and of the branches is of a different nature. I answer, this cannot be the meaning ; for it is such a holiness is spoken of as may be lost ; *it may be broken off by unbelief*, as the context shews : From whence it is evident, that covenant holiness or visible membership is what is meant,

and

and not real holiness. To the same purpose the Apostle says, 1 Cor. vii. 14. *Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.* That is, are in covenant with God; they are members of the church as well as their parents: There is no difference between the visible relation of the one and the other. To the like effect is that declaration, *Abs. ii. 39. The promise is unto you and to your children.* Infant baptism is strongly argued by all our Divines from this text; and if the argument is good, it proves infant's visible membership to be equal to that of their parents: They are both alike interested in the promise, so far as to have a standing in God's church. And we read *Gen. xvii. 13. That the covenant of circumcision was given for an everlasting covenant;* so that children do not grow out of it by their becoming adult.

3d. We may argue the point from the claims of this covenant relation as still subsisting, made by several particular persons after they arrived at adult age. How frequent is this plea in the Old Testament, *thou art the God of my Fathers?* Importing their present covenant relation to God through their parents means; otherwise there would be no force in the plea; For what benefit would it be if he were only the Father's God, and not the childrens too, by virtue of the covenant? *David pleads; Psal. cxvi. 16. I am thy Servant the son of thy Hand-maid.* He was far from thinking that his covenant relation to God by virtue of his circumcision ceased, when he became capable of acting for himself; he still holds it to be in as full force as ever; *I am the Son of thy Hand-maid.* I was early given to God in circumcision; that relation or membership still continues; and upon this ground I beg for covenant blessings. Distressed *Ephraim* uses the same plea; *Jer. xxxi. 18. Turn thou me, &c. for thou art the Lord my God.* He does not call God his God, because he thought he had a special saving interest in God at this time; for he verily thought himself unconverted; but pleads his covenant relation to God by virtue of circumcision, as an argument for special grace which shews that that relation still subsisted when he was grown up. The pious Mr. Vincent, in his Treatise of Conversion, interprets the text thus. Says he, "Under the Old Testament every Israelite that in infancy had been circumcised in the flesh, might go unto God for converting grace, for a circumcised heart; and go to him as unto a God, who had sealed a covenant to him. Ephraim upon this score calls the LORD

" LORD, his GOD, when he cries to him to be turned, *Jer.*
 " xxxi. 18. *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; for thou art*
 " *the LORD my GOD : As if he should say, LORD ! I have*
 " *been circumcised and dedicated unto thee, and laid under an obli-*
 " *gation to be thine : Oh circumcise and turn my heart, that I may*
 " *be thine indeed.* Do the children of believers under the
 " gospel want such an help to conversion as the Jewish chil-
 " dren under the law had ? Did CHRIST come to turn in-
 " fants out of covenant, who were once taken in ; and to les-
 " sen the saints privileges, instead of enlarging and augment-
 " ing them ? No, no ; he that hath been baptized and re-
 " ceived this seal of the New Testament, may with confidence
 " address unto GOD, and say ; - LORD ! *I have been baptized*
 " *with water ; Oh sprinkle me with the blood of JESUS ; bap-*
 " *tize me with his Spirit ; wash me thoroughly from my iniquity ;*
 " *cleanse and turn my heart to thee, and make me faithful and sted-*
 " *fast in thy covenant.*" Thus Mr. Vincent, p. 79. And the
 great Mr. Williams formerly of Hatfield, interprets this text in
Jer. in the same manner in his Sermon on Infant Baptism, p.
 19, 25. And I believe it is the sense that Divines generally
 put upon it. *

4th. We may argue this point from many other divine de-
 clarations. *The kingdom of GOD shall be taken from you,* says
 CHRIST, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.
Matr. xxi. 43. That is, they should be deprived of their co-
 venant relation to GOD by virtue of circumcision ; they should
 be cut off from their membership in the visible church, which
 is here called *the kingdom of GOD*, and the Gentiles should be
 admitted in their stead. To the same purpose is *Rom. xi.*
 The Apostle there declares at large how the Jews were broken
 off. That is, unchurched, and the Gentiles grafted in their
 room, to partake of the root and fatness of the olive-tree. Their
 visible relation to GOD by means of circumcision was at an
 end.

* The Reason why I enlarge on this text is, that it being
 mentioned by me in my *first Piece*, the sense I put on it was
 denied, which rendered such enlargement necessary. It is
 omitted *there*, to avoid needless repetitions. I would ob-
 serve further here, how incongruous the new sense put on
 the text is ; according to that it must run thus, *Turn thou*
me, for I am turned already ; give me faith, for I am now in
the exercise of faith ; become my GOD, for thou art my GOD at
this present. Which construction let him receive who will.

end. And innumerable declarations of the like nature are to be found in the Old Testament. That text is remarkable, *Jer. iii. 14. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married to you.* * That this is spoken of unregenerate is abundantly evident from the context; and yet God calls them *children*; that is, children of the covenant, within the pale of the church; and the expression, *I am married to you*, is still more strong: He does not say, *I will be married to you if you turn*; but, *I am married to you*; to denote their present covenant relation to God. They had not lost their membership received in circumcision, notwithstanding their vile degeneracies; and this he urges as one of the strongest motives to repentance and conversion. God was willing to receive them, notwithstanding their repeated adulteries and breaches of wedlock; *though ye have played the harlot with many lovers, yet return unto me, saith the Lord, ver. 1.* Again, how often does God call the *Israelites his people*, from one generation to another, even in the time of the greatest degeneracy; and this upon account of their visible covenant relation to him, or being members of his church by virtue of circumcision. And this relation continued until God gave them a bill of divorce at the *Affrian* and *Babylonish* captivities, when he pronounced *ho-ammi* upon them. That is, *they should be no longer his people nor be their God. Hos. i. 9, and Jer. iii. 8.* And the same doom was pronounced upon the *Jews*, sometime after CHRIST's death, by the Apostles, when they were wholly unchurched and deprived of their visible covenant relation or membership. *Rom. xi.* and elsewhere. All this serves to shew, that membership received in infancy by circumcision or baptism never ceases but continues in adult age, until a people or particular person be regularly cut off or cast out by some immediate act of God, or by the act of the church in the exercise of discipline.

We may also prove, that infant-membership continues after they arrived to such years, as to be capable of ministerial teachings, consequently of personal covenanting, from *John xxi. 15.*

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* We were in effect told the Sabbath after this Piece was delivered even in publick Prayer, and since that is a Sermon, that this text was addressed to backsliding believers: But this could not be; the address was made to the whole people of *Israel*, and they were almost universally corrupt at this time: Read not only the context, but *Jer. v. 1. and ix. 2.* and indeed the whole prophecy.

Feed my lambs, says CHRIST to Peter. They who are given to me in circumcision or baptism, are *my lambs*; they have my mark upon them; I own them still as part of my *stock*; they have not lost their membership, now they begin to be capable of acting for themselves: Therefore *feed* them as belonging to my fold; *feed* them as well as the more adult *sheep*; they are all equally members. And Peter tells the numerous congregation to which he preached, *Act. iii. 25. Ye are the children of the covenant, which God made with our Fathers.* He here plainly supposes their covenant relation received in infancy, still to remain; and urges it as a motive to repentance. And we may observe, that the terms *circumcised* and *uncircumcised* are used through all the Old Testament, to distinguish those who are of the visible church and who not; which plainly denotes, that infants membership ever remains in adult age, unless persons are regularly cut off for their wickedness by some judicial act of God or the church; in which case their *circumcision* becomes *uncircumcision*, that is, they cease to be members. Hence the city of Jerusalem is called the *holy city*, at the time of CHRIST's death, upon the account of this federal holiness, or their being in covenant with God by circumcision, when there was scarce a *real* holy person in it. *Matt. xxvii. 53.*

5th. This doctrine is attended with great inconveniencies, and several gross consequences result from it, which are not to be admitted. 1st. It puts baptized and unbaptized persons all upon a par or level: They seem to be exactly in the same situation, if the former are grown out of the church, and all relation ceases at adult age; we may well then object as those did of old; *Rom. iii. 1. What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?* The answer according to this scheme must be, *the advantage or profit is none at all.* But the Apostle was of another mind; he answers *Rom. v. ii. The profit is much every way. For to them pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law and the service of God, and the promises,* says he in another place *Rom. ix. 4.* And indeed it has been always esteemed a great privilege by the people of God for themselves and theirs to be under the covenant. And Mr. Robbins himself calls the baptism of infants an *inestimable privilege*; which cannot be true, if they are entitled to no privilege at all by virtue of their baptism. This leads me to observe, 2d. This doctrine tends to sadden the hearts of godly parents. It is a comfortable consideration to them, whether living or dying, that their children or relatives

tives are under the wing of the covenant, although not as yet converted; they hope covenant mercy will reach them in due time; they look upon this as a weighty plea with God in prayer, and accordingly use it; as *David* did for his son *Solomon*. 1 Chron. xxix. 19. * And all their hopes of good for their unregenerate offspring, when they lye a dying, is bottomed upon this foundation. "As a precious man, when dying, called his children about him said, children, *I have nothing to leave you, but a God, and a gracious covenant, and that is enough for you:*" And shall we dash all these hopes and pleas at once by telling them, that their children *have no part in the LORD*; that they have no more right to his covenant, than the worst *Indian* or *Heathen* in the land, who are within the sound of the gospel? God forbid. 3d. This doctrine in effect condemns the practice of God's people in their prayers for reformation. How frequent is this plea in scripture, and that in the worst times of degeneracy, *LORD, we are thy people; we are called by thy name, &c.* The meaning is, we are thy people in visible covenant; we were devoted to thee in circumcision; this relation still continues at adult age; therefore give this people the grace of the covenant. But how vain and futile does this plea appear to be, if infant membership be wholly lost, when persons become capable of acting for themselves, or of *personal* covenanting. 4th. This doctrine in effect makes infant baptism a sheer nullity; or at most a mean, little

- * The pious *Mr. David Jennings*, in his Sermon on this text, says, "*David's* argument here is, *give unto Solomon, MY SON.* His being *David's* Son was not only the reason that *David* was so much concerned for him, and so desirous that God would bless him, and make him good; but I conceive that he mentions it as an argument which he pleads with God in behalf of *Solomon*: *He is my Son.* As *David* had laid hold of God's covenant for himself; so here he pleads it for his Son too. *Solomon* had been consecrated to God in the ordinance of circumcision; thereby he was received to the visible church, and God's mark was set upon him. This might very well afford *David* an encouraging argument to plead in prayer, LORD, I have given up this my Son unto thee; I have done it by thine own appointment and command; I have solemnly consecrated him to thy service; behold thy mark is upon him! LORD, call him not off utterly, own him for thy Son, and make him thine forever. LORD, give him a perfect heart."

little insignificant rite, which may near as well be let alone, as done. Agreeable whereto it was said at last church-meeting, *What signifies it to have an infant sprinkled with a little water?* An expellion that made me shudder.

My Brethern, I beg to know what infants are baptized for, if they are not made members of God's church? To what end is this ordinance? Of what benefit and advantage? And are not the *Baptists* right in laying it aside? If you say, it is to lay them under *stranger bonds* to be the Lord's when they grow up. Pray, what scripture have you to prove, that this is the only end of baptism? If the greater arguments from the consideration of God's being our Creator, Preserver, Governor, and Redeemer, will not prevail, how little can be expected from this? I must profess, that, if I thought these *bonds* were all that was imported in infant's baptism, and that there was no consideration to be had of the *privileges* accompanying the relation, and of the expectation we may rationally have of God's blessing attending his own institution, I should not think those much to blame who wholly rejected infant baptism. I am sure those who are for the new doctrine would make but a poor figure in encountering the *Anabaptists*, if ever they should be called to engage in that controversy; and they must certainly lay aside some of their present favourite opinions, or they could never expect any success in their opposition.

I conclude this head with a quotation or two: The pious President *Wadsworth*, after explaining some scriptures, concludes thus; these things plainly shew, that children of the "covenant do not cease to be in God's covenant merely by
"their growing up from an infant to an adult state; as some are
"apt to imagine. No indeed; God will be ever mindful of
"his covenant; He has commanded his covenant for ever. *Psal.*
"iii. 5, 9. *I swear unto thee, and entered into covenant with*
"thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. *Ezek.*
"xvi. 18. Those in God's covenant are his; he will not alie-
"nate his right to them, and none else have authority to do
"it. * Again, he says, these children admitted in minority,
"when grown up, do continue in God's covenant, visible
"members of his visible church, unless justly excommuni-
"cated for their wickedness. †

What the sentiments of our Fathers were relating to this point will appear from the *New-England Memorials*, where Secretary *Morton* cites the following words from Governor *Bradford's*

* Bonds of Baptism, p. 27, 28. † Treatise of Baptism, p. 38.

ford's manuscript History. " In 1629, the two Ministers of
 " Salem being seriously studious of reformation, they considered of the state of their children, together with their parents; concerning which, Letters did pass between Mr. Higginson and Mr. Brewster, the reverend Elder of the church of Plymouth; and they did agree in their judgments, viz. concerning the church membership of the children with their parents, and that baptism was a seal of their membership: Only when they were adult, they being not scandalous, they were to be examined by the church-officers, and upon their approbation of their fitness, and upon the children's publick and personal owning of the covenant, they were to be received unto the Lord's supper. Accordingly Mr. Higginson's eldest Son, being about fifteen years of age, was owned to have been received a member together with his parents; and being privately examined by the Pastor, Mr. Shelton, about his knowledge in the principles of religion, he did present him before the church, when the Lord's supper was to be administered; and the child then publickly and personally owning the covenant of the God of his Father, he was admitted unto the Lord's supper. It being then professedly owned, according to 1 Cor. vii. 14. That the children of the church are holy unto the Lord, as well as their parents: Accordingly, the parents owning and retaining the baptism which they themselves received in their infancy in their native land; as they had any children born, baptism was administered unto them."

But it would be endless to cite human testimonies, since this has been the universally received opinion of Ministers and churches from CHRIST's time to this day; except Mr. Davenport, Mr. Street, and two or three others in the time of the Synod, and a few Connecticut Ministers, &c. in our days; who are forced to advance the contrary absurd doctrine, in order to uphold their opposition to the practice recommended by the Synod.

Upon the whole, as Mr. Robbins expressly granted at the last church-meeting, that, according to our Catechism, the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized; and, as I have fully proved that baptized persons are members of the visible church, it undeniably follows, that their children are to be baptized; and none can lawfully deny them this privilege, unless they have forfeited it by their wickedness.

What

What an amazing thing then is it, that any are so fond of principles, urging them with so much heat and vehemence, that tend so directly to unchurch their posterity, and leave them in the state of outcasts and aliens to God's covenant?

If what has been said, does not satisfy, I desire that Dr. *Incr. Mather's* twelve arguments in proof of the point may be read, as also the arguments of the *Synod*; with which what I have alledged does but little interfere; so fruitful is the scripture of arguments, to prove children's membership and its continuance at adult age.

II. It is objected, "that this *Practice* and the arguments made use of to support it, have an unavoidable tendency to subvert some of the grand doctrines of the gospel and of *calvinism*, and to establish some of the most dangerous tenets of *arminianism*." What a bug-bear? What a scare-crow is here thrown out, either to stop my mouth, or to make people imagine I hold something very dreadful, to prevent their listening to me, or duly weighing the arguments that I bring? But I trust the Brethren have more understanding, than to be imposed upon in this sort. There is really no more connexion between this practice and *arminianism*, than between it and *atheism*. And I challenge all the world to show the contrary. If there is such a connexion, then Mr. *Leonard*, your former beloved Pastor, was an *Arminian*; then this church have been *Arminians* for forty one years, ever since they introduced this practice, and Mr. *Robbins* was an *Arminian* for the first nine years of his ministry, while he held to this practice. Yea, Mr. *Stoddard* and almost all the Ministers and churches in the country are *Arminians*; Yea, *Calvin* himself was an *Arminian*, who was with us in this point of baptism. Yea further, St. *James* the Apostle was an *Arminian*, who held *justification by works before men* as much as we. Here let me give a specimen how this charge may be supported against the Apostle, St. *James* holds, that we are *justified by works*, that is, by our lives and conversions, *in the sight of men*, in the sight of the church and there. Hence they will unavoidably be led to think, *that we are likewise justified by works in the sight of God*. consequently St. *James* holds doctrines of an *arminian* tendency. What trifling is this? What an absurd consequence indeed? And yet, this is *exactly* the argument that is produced to prove me an *Arminian*. Methinks the boldest face may be justly ashamed ever to mention it any more.

III. I now pass to make some OBSERVATION for the further illustrating the point, &c.

1st. I think the controversy is greatly mis-stated. By Mr. Robbins's management and arguments, one would think that the dispute here is the same that subsisted at North-Hampton some years ago between Mr. Edwards and his people. But this is not the case ; for Mr. Edwards meddles little or nothing with *baptism*, but the *Lord's supper* ; and all his discourse is about qualifications for that, which I never yet pretended to disclaim ; neither did it ever enter into my heart, that the chief design of our church-meetings was to determine, whether Mr. Stoddard's doctrine about the *Lord's supper* was right or not. The dispute here relates entirely to the initiating ordinance of *baptism*. And even as to this, the controversy is not ; whether they should be *visible Christians* that offer themselves or not ; we agree that they should be such. In what then do we differ ? Why, 1st. our opponents say, that the *highest* sort of evidence of grace is necessary in this case ; we say the *lowest* is sufficient, especially with respect to persons already baptized, as baptism is a sacrament of entrance.

But what is this *highest* sort of evidence that they insist on ? Why, this is a mystery that I could never yet unfold. Is it a particular relation of experiences ? No ; this, they say, is not absolutely necessary ; this is not the standard that the scripture gives for the church to judge by. What then is it ? Why, *profession and practice*, or the life and conversation. To this we again agree : In what then do we differ but in words ? But if Mr. Robbins now says, contrary to all his former declarations, that a relation is absolutely necessary, how can he look upon those, who have already owned the covenant as members in full communion, as he says he does, that never made any such relation ? What an inconsistency would be here ? 2d. They say, that none should come to baptism, but they should immediately come likewise to the *Lord's supper*. But we say, they may come to the one ordinance and not to the other in some cases ; that baptized persons, of regular conversations, have right to come, and none have right to deny them : Here then the dispute chiefly lies, and not so much about *qualifications*. Why then do we hear so much concerning them, as if the hinge of the controversy lay here ? If Mr. Robbins would only receive those whom he calls *qualified*, to own the covenant, &c. he would meet with little opposition. But it seems they must be excluded without they will come immediately to full communion, let their scruples be what they will, which is what I think he cannot answer to God or the church. Wherefore I desire to hear no more about qualifications,

ons, about *moral and gracious sincerity*, which are terms I never used, until this point be settled.

2d. I observe, that it is peculiar to those of the *congregational way* to have a church, as it were, within a church; to make distinction between members at large, and members in particular, between communicants and others. All other persuasions reckon baptized persons such members, as to be entitled to all church privileges whenever they demand them, if they lay no bar in the way by their wickedness: Which is the reason why we read of no disputes in such churches about the subjects of baptism, such as subsist among the *congregationists*.

3d. I observe, our Brethren of the other side of the question, are exactly like those *Disciples*, who because the *Jeews*, we read of in scripture, did not follow CHRIST so fully, and in the manner they expected and required, *forbad them to bring their children to CHRIST*. But CHRIST says, *forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom, &c.*

4th. I observe, that if a person baptized says, *that as far as he knows his own heart, he is sincerely willing to give up himself and his children to God*, that is enough. The Minister should go no further. He has no business to puzzle and confound him with a long discourse about *moral and gracious sincerity*, which it is likely the candidate will understand little of.

5th. I observe, that if a man offers himself to either ordinance, only to *be seen of men*, &c. and knows it, nothing that can be said to him about *grace* will hinder him: He will come, let the Minister say what he will. But it is only the *tender conscience*, that have been under *some work of the Spirit*, that will be scared and terrified away by the present harsh method of treating the subjects. So here is the utmost danger, as I have observed heretofore, of *breaking the bruised reed, and quenching the smoking flax, &c.*

6th. I observe it as a certain maxim of truth, that if a man declares upon oath more than he knows, he is guilty of *perjury*, though it should happen afterwards to be true. If a man then publicly professes, that *God is his God*, and that he has *saving faith*, and does not know it to be so, though it should appear afterwards to be the case, he certainly goes beyond the line of truth; he solemnly, and, as it were, upon oath declares that to be true, which he does not know but may be false; which is the very essence of a lye. Consequently there can be no covenanting with God upon this new scheme, without a *certain knowledge* of a man's gracious state. And in addition to this,

this I observe, that Mr. Robbins, according to his plan, must necessarily tell every candidate that offers, that it is *saving faith* he professes, when the covenant is propounded to him; and he must necessarily tell him further, that if he *has* *not* saving faith, he cannot profess it. How then can such a candidate proceed one step further, without he *knows* he has saving faith? Or further, where is the consistency to tell a man that it is enough for him to say that he *believes* he has saving faith, when discouraged with in private; if, when he comes into publick, he must absolutely profess saving faith, without any *hope* is in the case? How can these things hang together? But what are these *prevailing hopes*, founded on scripture evidence, so much talked of? Are they not in effect the same with assurance? Prevailing hopes may be accompanied with *doubts* and *fears*; and so may assurance; full assurance I know excludes all doubts, but not so the other; there are *degrees* of assurance. So that I do not see why they need start so much at the word *assurance*, when they hold the same thing in other words. Mr. Ballou uses the word, *knowledge* or *knowing* in this case, which is certainly as strong a term as assurance.

7th I observe, that the word *seal* is much used in this controversy; and indeed it seems that almost all the arguments used on the other side of the question are founded on this word. People are so continually dinned and drowned with it, that they imagine there is more in it than there is. Therefore I shall add a little on this point. There is no *gospel ordinance* whatsoever but carries the *nature*, the very *essence* of a *seal*. Prayer is a seal of the covenant of grace. When we say, *our Father which art in Heaven* in sincerity, we set to our seal that God is *our Father*. Hearing is a seal; when we heartily believe the truths delivered, we set to our seal that God is *true*. John iii. 33. *Reading the word* is a seal; when we apply the law or gospel to our souls, we seal the truth of it. Must then all unregenerate men be debarred from these ordinances, because these, *properly used*, are seals, always seals, of the covenant of grace? No, say they, these are *moral duties*, and therefore ought to be performed by all; but baptism and the Lord's supper are *positive special institutions*, and are only to be performed by true believers. Here then the argument from the *nature of a seal* is given up: It is in effect granted, that unregenerate men may partake of *some* of the seals of the covenant of grace, though not of *others*; and the reason why they are ex-

eluded from the one and not from the other, is not taken from the nature of a seal, but from a different ground, viz. the one's being of a moral and the other of positive institution. How absurd then is this way of reasoning taken merely from the nature of a seal? But to follow then the argument a little further. The argument, from the nature of a seal being given up, and another foundation established in its room, let us see how far this will hold. The sacraments, say they, are *positive special institutions*, and therefore confined to believers. But does not this prove too much? May not the same be said of all the sacrifices under the law, as well as of the passover, baptism, &c. They were not of a moral nature, but of *positive special institution*. Must not then an unregenerate Jew engage in the daily sacrifices, or the sacrifices offered every Sabbath, because of positive institution? Why; this would have destroyed all publick worship at once among the Jews. If none but *regenerates* must have come to the temple, (which were so few generally) what thin assemblies would they have had. It follows then that as ordinances being merely of *positive special institution*, is not in itself a sufficient bar to unregenerates attending in them. So that both their grounds here fail them. But what does all this arguing tend to, will they say, but to encourage unregenerate men, knowing themselves to be such, to come to both sacraments? I answer, this is not my design in it, but only to shew the weakness of the argument taken from the nature of a seal, &c. But thus much I say, if a person under serious religious impressions should out of a sense of duty come to either ordinance, he sins less in coming than in staying away, though it should afterwards appear that he was unregenerate at the time. This leads me,

8th. To take notice of some absurd doctrines delivered by the chief promoter of the new scheme. These are Mr. Bellamy's words: "When a natural man owns the covenant, or pretends to own it, for it is impossible for such a man to own the covenant of grace really, he sins against God in a more provoking manner than if he had committed *drunkenness, fornication, and adultery*;" p. 48. And the reason he gives is,

because
 "There are some other considerations which render it not proper, that baptism and the Lord's supper should be made as common as the other ordinances; but the argument for their restrictive use, taken merely from the nature of a seal, proves nothing either one way or the other."

because such are guilty of *lying to God and perjury*: This, we may observe, is spoken not only of *willful hypocrites*, who do all to be seen of men, &c. but of all unregenerate men whatsoever let them be under ever so great religious impressions, ever so serious or conscientious in what they do. This I stick not to call *horrible doctrine*, contrary to scripture and reason. According to this, 1st. *Abab* sinned more in *bumbling himself* and *walking softly*, which necessarily implies his *confessing his sin* and *promising reformation*; I say, that he sinned more in doing this than in murdering *Naboth* and taking away his vineyard by *injustice and violence*. 2^d. According to this doctrine, *Hizkiah* and *Joiab* sinned more in promoting, and the people in joining in *renewing covenant*, than they would have done in murdering a whole city, or all turning *drunkards and adulterers*: For, it is evident by the peoples after apostacy, that their hearts were not generally right with God in the transaction. 3^d. According to this doctrine, the King and the people of *Ninevah* sinned more provokingly in repenting and reforming in the manner they did, than they would have if they had murdered *Jorah* and bid defiance to the God of Israel. 4th. According to this doctrine, if a sinner unconverted in a time of sickness or other great distress, should acknowledge his sins and *promise* reformation with all appearing earnestness, he is all the while committing a greater sin in *promising*, than drunkenness or adultery. What a figure would a Minister make, if he should stop the sinner's mouth by telling him this? Is it not rather the Minister's duty to *encourage* him, though at the same time telling him that he must go to *Christ* for strength, otherwise all his resolutions and *promises* will come to nothing?

For my part, I always thought, and it is the opinion of almost all Divines, that a particular persons or a peoples performing a duty with any sort of sincerity, was a *lesser sin* than a *total neglect*, &c. And as to *special ordinances* particularly, although I think they ought to be *visible Christians* that come; yet that if they do come conscientiously, though unconverted, their sin is not so great and provoking, as a contemptuous turning their back upon the ordinance. The scriptures tell us, that he that was not circumcised, or did not eat the passover, was to be cut off from his people; that is, put to death: But no such punishment was threatened to an unregenerate man that performed the duty.

But what signifies mens coming to special ordinance, if their hearts be not engaged in the duty? What is here but

their form? And what can be more provoking than that? I answer, the *form* of religion compared with the *power*, is a *little thing*; but in itself it is a *great thing*: But where that remained, God hath graciously returned many and many a time to his people. But when both *form* and *power* were gone, there never was an instance of God's remaining with that people, but they were made examples of vengeance.

9th. I observe, that we seem to be agreed in this, that none but *visible Christians* or *believers* should be admitted to either ordinance. But when they come to explain themselves, it is evident that by *visible Christians* they mean *real Christians*; so confounding all distinction between the *visible* and *invisible* church, in direct contradiction to almost all Divines. And herein they talk just as the *Baptists* do, who destroy all difference between the *external* and *internal* parts of the covenant.

10th. I observe, that Mr. Davenport, the great writer against the *Synod*, was consistent with himself: He professedly acknowledges that the church had nothing to do with the baptized immediately in a way of discipline, as not being *immediate members*. But our Pastor called the church together at their first meeting, partly to *discipline the baptized children of the church*; which implies, that he thought them to be *immediate members*: And this is a matter that yet lies under our consideration undetermined. If he has since altered his mind he ought publicly to declare that he was then in an error, and that he did wrong in proposing discipline to the church, or our calling those to account with whom we have nothing to do, according to his present principles. This would be *ingenuous*, and what the church have a right to expect, if he has led them in a wrong path, or proposed what ought not to be proposed. For what have we to do to judge them that are without? 1 Cor. v. 12.

11th. I would observe, upon a passage that fell from Mr. Robbins at last church-meeting. He said, that some who had taken the pains to turn to the passages of scripture that were produced by the *Synod*, said, they found them nothing to the purpose to prove their point; which shews, that he takes upon trust what is alleged on that side, and that he never examined them himself. Is this an impartial way of proceeding? Is this the manner of a lover of truth, to see with others eyes? On the contrary. I assert that these texts are much to the purpose, and that he would have found them so, if he had given them an impartial examination.

12th. I would observe, the policy of some to get this practice abolished. They endeavour to instill into people, that the whole design of the *opposition* is to get Mr. Robbins away; hoping, if such a notion be once imbibed, it will put them into such a ferment, that they will join in abolishing the practice, right or wrong, in order to keep Mr. Robbins. But how unjust is this? And what gross uncharitableness does it involve in it? Pray, who was it first brought this dispute into the church? Not we, sure. Who is it that are for *innovations*? Not we; And must we submit to innovations, for fear our Minister should run away from us? Not we, unless our consciences were convinced. If Mr. Robbins is resolved to leave us, if he cannot gain his point, we cannot help it; we must do our duty, and leave the event to God. As for any *direct design* to get him away, it never entered into my heart; and I never heard any thing liſped by my Brethren tending that way: All our design is, I can speak it for myself, and believe it of my Brethren; I say, all our design is to discharge our consciences and do our duty: We think the point of *very great importance*, and cannot give it up. And in order to promote peace, we have already proposed an *expedient* that would make all easy, and hurt no man's conscience. But with what contempt was it rejected.

If we patiently submit in this point, merely to please or keep Mr. Robbins, who will ever dare to speak against *innovations*, again, let them come ever so fast? We have had something new started to trouble the churches peace, I think, every two or three years since his settlement; And who can assure us, that it will not be so hereafter, until the whole of the *Connecticut discipline* be brought in upon us? † If any make the least *opposition*, why ^{they}

* As soon as I had finished reading this Piece to the church; Mr. Robbins, instead of answering the argument, made a few general reflections: The substance was, "That I darkned counsel with words without knowledge; that I dressed him up in bear skins; that the whole of my Piece was calculated to represent him in a ridiculous light; that he suspected it before, but was now confirmed in it, that our whole design was to get him away." Thus, in direct terms in the face of the church, giving me the lye after such solemn asseverations.

† Scarce any are ignorant that the discipline in *Connecticut* verges

they will be immediately branded with a design of getting away Mr. Robbins; and then it must pass without controul. But I trust the Brethren are better fortified than to be led away by such insinuations; and hope that *whisperers, tale-bearers, and sowers of discord* among Brethren will be disappointed of their aim, according to the directions we had last Sabbath; and agreeable to the Apostle's advice; *Rom. xvi. 17. Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, and avoid them.*

Upon the whole, I hope whatever the Brethren do in this matter will be founded upon *full conviction of conscience*; I say, *full conviction of conscience*; and that they will not be influenced one way or the other merely to please any man whatsoever; and that they will not hold the doctrine of CHRIST with *respect of persons*; but with all impartiality will pass their judgment, as they will answer it at the bar of CHRIST.

I shall conclude with some PROPOSALS. And my first proposal is, instead of contending what privileges belong to the children of the church, we had better unite in granting them some *privileges*; and then set upon the vigorous exercise of *discipline*. And we may hope for God's blessing in *reforming*, or at least in *restraining* our licentious youth.

2d. I would propose this churches solemnly *renewing covenants* on a day of fasting and prayer, according to the model of our Fathers. This has been found a happy expedient of reviving religion in times of great degeneracy; the divine blessing usually accompanying it; as we see in the time of Kings *Hekiah* and *Josiah*, and in the days of our Fathers. This tends to revive a sense of covenant vows and engagements, both in communicants and the children of the church, and excites a more strict and circumspect walk.

3d. I would propose that the church, by a *formal vote*, adopt the method I proposed the last town-meeting, *viz.* for a neighbouring Minister to baptize the children of the church, as long as Mr. Robbins's scruples remain. By which it will appear, that we have no design of forcing Mr. Robbins to act against his conscience, as the matter is represented abroad, or of getting him away. We are willing to give him liberty of conscience;

and
ges towards *Presbyterianism*; and it is natural for those brought up under such a constitution to be biassed in his favour; and therefore we may expect it will be thrust in upon us, if we merely submit in other things.

and expect the same liberty from him. And should think it hard, if he endeavours to prevent any Minister's coming.

4th. and lastly, I would propose, that seeing Mr. Robbins's chief stick is about *qualifications*, if he will go on with the practice, he may *examine* the candidate as much as he pleases; though we think there is no divine warrant for it, with respect to persons baptized; but we would by no means have the practice wholly laid aside.

As to the method proposed, of receiving the candidates to full communion, and then dispensing with their coming to the Lord's table, which is again reurged, I have said enough before. I would only add, that I look upon it as *the old practice spoiled*: A few circumstances must be added to render it non-sensical, ridiculous and contradictory in itself. No church in the province practices any thing like it. A report indeed we have, that one church in *Connecticut* have adopted some such scheme, whether true or not we cannot tell; And if there be something in it, we have no particular account of the plan: and shall we merely upon such a vague report, without consulting one Minister or church, make such a material alteration as this? What presumption? What head-long *Yehu*-like act would it be? I am confident, not one man that should vote for it, but would be ashamed of it before a twelve-month came about. May the Lord keep us from wrong paths: May he lead us into all truth, and direct us in the way of duty. May this church still retain its precious privileges, and transmit them inviolate to the latest posterity: And may no *weapon* formed against its welfare prosper.

Perhaps those who live at a distance may be desirous to know how this dispute terminated. Why, in short, the church, with a view to peace, have voted to "dissolve the meeting and to drop the affair for the present, and to reassume the consideration thereof when they shall think proper." Thus the matter is left in suspense. The practice remains unrepealed, and the Minister as much unsatisfied with it as ever. So that the door seems at present shut against all comers. How things will finally issue, is beyond me to say. But I trust God will over-rule all to his glory, and the best good of his church and people, and bring this controversy at last to a happy

